

THE ARGOSY.

APRIL, 1880.

THE MYSTERIES OF HERON DYKE.

CHAPTER X.

A DAY WITH PHILIP CLEEVE.

WHEN Philip Cleeve opened his eyes the morning after his visit to The Lilacs it took him a minute or two to collect his thoughts, and call to mind all that had happened during the previous evening. In the cold unsympathetic light of early morn his overheated fancies of the preceding night seemed to have little more substance in them than a dream. He could not quite forget Margaret Ducie's liquid black eyes, or the fascination of her smile; but the glamour was gone, and he thought of them as of something that could never trouble his peace of mind again. "It was that champagne," thought Philip.

There was, however, one very tangible fact connected with the doings of the preceding night which would not allow itself to be forgotten. He had gambled away Mr. Tiplady's twenty pounds, and it would have to be his disagreeable duty this morning to ask his mother to make good the loss. Mentally and bodily he felt out of sorts, and out of humour with himself and the world. Very little breakfast did he eat. Lady Cleeve only came down when it was getting time for him to set out for the office. She asked a little about his visit of the previous evening, and also after Freddy Bootle, who was rather a favourite of hers.

"Bootle has promised to dine here to-morrow," said Philip. "This evening I dine with him at the Rose and Crown." He left his seat and went to the window. The disagreeable moment could be put off no longer. Going behind Lady Cleeve's chair, he leaned over and kissed her. "Mother, I am going to ask you to do a most preposterous thing," he said.

"Not many times in your life, dear, have you done that," she answered. "But what is it?"

"I want you to give me twenty-five pounds."

"Twenty-five pounds is a large sum, Philip—that is, a large sum for me. But I suppose you would not ask me for it unless you really need it."

"Certainly not, mother. I need it for a very special purpose indeed."

"Can you tell me for what?"

"No," said Philip, in a low tone. "It—it is for someone," he rather lamely added.

"You are going to lend it! Well, Philip, if it is for some worthy friend who is in want, I will say nothing," said Lady Cleeve, who had implicit confidence in her son. "You shall have the money."

Philip's face was burning. He turned to the window again.

"Do you know that next Tuesday will be your birthday, Philip?" asked his mother. "You will be twenty-two. How the years fly as we grow old! Your asking for this money brings to my mind something which I did not intend to mention to you till your birthday was actually here; but, there is no reason why I should not tell you now. Can you guess, my dear boy, what amount I have saved up, and safely put away for you in Nullington Bank? But how should it be possible for you to guess?"—Philip had turned by this time, and was staring at his mother.

"I have saved up twelve hundred pounds," continued Lady Cleeve. "Yes, Philip, twelve hundred pounds; and on the day you are twenty-two the amount in full will be transferred into your name, and will become your sole property."

"Mother!" was all that the young man could say in that first moment of surprise. Then he took her hand and kissed it.

She smiled, and stroked his curls fondly. "I need hardly tell you, Philip, that the hope I have had, all along, was that my savings might ultimately be of use in advancing your interests in whatever profession you might finally choose. You have now been two years with Mr. Tiplady, and I gather that you are quite satisfied to remain with him. I have had a little quiet chat with Mr. Tiplady: you know that he and I are very old friends. I named to him the amount I had lying by me in the Bank, and hinted to him that he might do worse than take you into partnership. His reply was that he had never hitherto thought about a partner, but that the idea was worth consideration, more especially as he had some thought of retiring from business in the course of a few years. There the matter was left, and I have had no talk with him since, but I think the opening would be a most excellent one for you."

"Twelve hundred pounds seems a lot of money to hand over to old Tiplady," said Philip, with rather a long face.

"Why 'old' Tiplady, dear? He is younger than I am," said

Lady Cleeve, with a faint smile. "His business is excellent and superior, as you know; one in which, if you join him, you may rise to eminence. Mr. Tiplady seemed to doubt whether twelve hundred pounds was a sufficient sum to induce him to take you into partnership. And of course it seems ridiculously small, compared with the advantages. But I suppose he thinks your connections would go for something—and he is too well off for money to be an object with him. At first you would take but a small share."

Philip shrugged his shoulders and whistled under his breath. "We can talk of that another time," he said. "How can I thank you enough, mother mine, for this wonderful gift? You are a veritable fairy queen."

In truth, he could not think where so much money had come from. Twelve hundred pounds! He knew the extent of his mother's income and what proportion of it, of late years, had found its way into his own pocket; but he did not know that his mother, in view of some such contingency as the present one, had begun to save and pinch and put away a few pounds now and again even before her husband's death—many years before. The magic of compound interest had done the rest.

Philip Cleeve carried a light heart with him that morning as he set out for the office, and the twenty-five pounds given him by his mother. He had not only got out of his present difficulty easily and without trouble, but in a few short days he would be a capitalist on his own account; he would be one of those favoured mortals, a man with a balance at his banker's and a cheque-book of his own in his pocket. He could hardly believe in the reality of his good fortune. As for handing over in toto to Mr. Tiplady the sum that was coming thus unexpectedly into his possession—it was a matter that required consideration, very grave consideration indeed. But he would have plenty of time to think about that afterwards.

As he crossed the market-place he stopped to look in the window of Thompson the jeweller. There was a gold hunting-watch lying in it that he had often admired. In a few days, should he be so minded, he might make it his own. And that pretty signet ring. The price of it was only five guineas—a mere bagatelle to a man with twelve hundred pounds. Hitherto he had never worn a ring, but other young men wore such things, and there was no reason now why he should not do the same. A minute or two later he passed his tailor. "Good morning, Dobson," he said with a smile. "I shall look you up in a day or two."

Having to pass the Rose and Crown Hotel on his way to the office, he thought he might as well look up Freddy Bootle. But that gentleman was not yet downstairs, so Philip set out again. As he passed Welland's, the florist, he saw two magnificent bouquets in the window. All at once it struck him that it would not be amiss to pay a morning call at The Lilacs and present Mrs. Ducie with one

of the bouquets. Without pausing to reflect, he entered the shop. He was waited on by pretty Mary Welland, the florist's lame daughter, by whose deft fingers the flowers had been arranged. After a little smiling chat, he and Mary being old acquaintances, he chose one of the bouquets and had it wrapped up in tissue paper. The price was half a guinea, but to Philip, in the mood in which he then was, half a guinea seemed a matter of little moment.

Philip had started on his way again, when he encountered Maria Kettle. They both started as their eyes met, and a guilty flush mounted to Philip's brow. Maria at once held out her hand, and her glance fell on the bouquet in its envelope of tissue paper. All in a moment it flashed into Philip's mind that to-day was Maria's birthday. There was little more than the difference of a week between their ages.

"Good morning, Philip," began Maria. "Papa and I have been wondering what had become of you. You have only been to see us once since we got back."

"The fact is," said Philip in a hesitating way, very unusual with him, "I have been much engaged—Bootle is here, now, too, and he has taken up a good deal of my time. But I have not forgotten that this is your birthday, Maria, and ——" here he paused and looked at the bouquet. "In fact, I was on my way to ——" then he hesitated again and held out the bouquet.

"You were on the way to the vicarage," said Maria, with a smile, "and these pretty flowers are for me. I know they are pretty before I look at them. It was kind of you to remember my birthday."

Philip felt immensely relieved. "Accept them with my love, Maria," he whispered, and at that moment he felt that he loved her very dearly. Then he pressed one of her hands in his and spoke the good wishes customary on such occasions. A bright, glad look came into Maria's eyes, and her pale cheek flushed at Philip's words. He turned and walked a little way with her, and then they parted.

Philip sighed as he turned away. What an air of quiet goodness there was about Maria! How sweet and saintly she looked in her dress of homely blue with the sunlight shining on her! "If she had lived five hundred years ago, her face would have been painted as that of some mediæval saint," muttered Philip to himself. "She is far away too good to be the wife of such a shuffling weak-minded fellow as I am."

When he reached the florist's shop on his way back to the office, the remaining bouquet was still in the window. He hesitated a moment and then went in. "I will take that other bouquet if you please, Miss Welland," he said: but Mary noticed that there was no smile on his face this time, as she tied up the flowers. Philip set off in the direction of The Lilacs. He was dissatisfied with himself for what he had done, there was a sore feeling at work within him,

and yet his steps seemed drawn irresistibly towards the roof that sheltered Margaret Ducie.

He had got about half way to the cottage when he was overtaken by Captain Lennox in his dog-cart. "'Morning, Cleeve," called out the Captain; "where are you off to in such a hurry?"

"I didn't know that I was in a hurry," said Philip as he faced round, while that wretched tell-tale flush, which he could not succeed in keeping down, mounted to his face. "The fact is, I was on my way to the cottage," he added. "I thought that I might venture to call on Mrs. Ducie and ask her acceptance of a few flowers."

"And she will be very pleased to see you, I do not doubt," answered Lennox. "I am on the way home myself; so jump up and I will give you a lift."

When they reached the cottage they found Mrs. Ducie practising some songs which she had just received from London. She wore a dress of some soft, creamy material embroidered with flowers, with ornamental silver pins in her hair and a silver snake round one of her wrists. She accepted Philip's flowers very graciously. "How charmingly they are arranged," she said; "and what an eye for artistic effect. I must try to paint them before they begin to fade."

Philip begged that he might not interrupt her singing; so she resumed her seat at the piano, and he stationed himself behind her and turned over the leaves of her music. Now that he was here and in her presence, and so near to her that he could have stooped and touched her hair with his lips, the infatuation of last night crept over him again with irresistible force. He was like a man bewitched, from whom all power of volition seems stolen away. She looked to him even more beautiful this morning in the soft cool twilight of the drawing-room than when seen by lamplight yesterday evening. Nowhere had he seen a woman like her, or one who exercised over him so nameless but all-powerful a charm. By-and-by she persuaded him to sing too.

At last Philip remembered that he must go. The office was not pressed for work just now, and Mr. Tiplady had given him a partial holiday during Bootle's stay: but Philip felt that there was reason in all things. Moreover, Tiplady was away himself to-day.

"When the cat's away," laughed Captain Lennox, upon Philip's saying this.

"I can drive you into the town if you like, Mr. Cleeve," said Mrs. Ducie, who had just reappeared, dressed for going out. "My ponies are at the gate."

Philip accepted the offer gladly. "I shall see you later in the day," were Lennox's last words to him as he was driven away.

Mrs. Ducie was an accomplished whip, and had a thorough mastery over her high-spirited ponies. Very few minutes sufficed to bring the party to Nullington. They had slackened their pace a little

while a load of timber drew out of the way, when Maria Kettle stepped out of a chemist's shop just as they were passing the door. She saw Mrs. Ducie and Philip, and at the same moment they recognised her. A look that was partly surprise and partly trouble came into her eyes; but she bowed gravely and passed on. Mrs. Ducie smiled and bowed; Philip, colouring furiously, greeted Maria with an awkward nod, and then turned away his head. How thoroughly ashamed of himself he felt!

"What a charming young lady Miss Kettle is," said Mrs. Ducie a minute later.

Philip gave a keen look at his companion's face, but there was nothing to be read there. "I was not aware that you knew Miss Kettle," he said a little stiffly.

"I have had the pleasure of meeting her three or four times since her return, and Ferdinand and I attend church regularly. I never met anyone who with so much goodness was so entirely unaffected."

It was like heaping coals of fire on Philip's head for him to have to listen to these words. Nothing more was said till the carriage drew up for Philip to alight. Mrs. Ducie held out her hand. "I hope we shall see you at the cottage again soon, Mr. Cleeve," she graciously said. "I assure you that both to my brother and myself your visits will always be a pleasure."

Philip replied suitably, and went his way. He was grievously annoyed at having been seen by Maria Kettle in the act of driving out with Mrs. Ducie; yet he could not forget how charming Margaret was, and how kindly she had received his flowers.

Scarcely had he at length entered the office when Freddy Bootle came in, asking him to take holiday for the rest of the day. The old clerk, Mr. Best, manager in Mr. Tiplady's absence, was agreeable to it. Philip was a favourite of his, and there was not much doing.

Away went Philip and his friend gaily, arm-in-arm. Philip's heels were always light where pleasure was concerned. After eating some luncheon at the Rose and Crown, they adjourned to the billiard-room. Only then did it occur to Philip that the bank-notes his mother had given him in the morning were in his pocket still. He ought to have handed them over to Mr. Best; he had meant to do so; but other matters had put it out of his head.

Lord Camberley and Captain Lennox came in to dinner, in answer to the invitation of Mr. Bootle. Afterwards they all sat talking, over their coffee and cigars. Captain Lennox, the thought striking him, enquired of Bootle whether his lost watch had turned up.

"Not it," said Freddy. "It will never turn up, any more than your purse will. It was an odd thing, come to think of it, that Mrs. Carlyon should have been robbed on the same night. Just as if the same thief had done it all!"

Lord Camberley pricked up his ears. "How was it?" he asked. "What were the robberies?" And Mr. Bootle related them.

"Pretty good cheek—to leave the case under the curtains and walk off with the baubles!" observed his lordship. "I suppose it was too big to carry away?"

"Too big to carry away unobserved, and too big to be stowed away in a coat, I take it," said Captain Lennox. "How large was it, Cleeve?—you saw it, I think. The fellow must have disposed of the articles about his pockets."

"How large?" repeated Philip, who was sitting with his chair tilted and his head thrown back, puffing forth volumes of smoke in silence, "oh—about *that* large"—making a movement with his hand. "Just give me my coffee-cup, will you, Freddy."

Later, the party sat down to cards. They began by playing Napoleon, as on the previous evening; but this was changed for the still more dangerous game of Unlimited Loo. At neither one game nor the other was Philip Cleeve anything like a match for those experienced players, Camberley and Lennox, and he grew nervous and excitable. When the party broke up Philip had not only lost the twenty-five pounds given him in the morning by his mother, but fifteen pounds more, for which Lord Camberley held his I O U. As for Freddy Bootle, he did not much care for cards, and he played with a severe indifference to either the smiles or frowns of fortune: if he lost, it was a matter of little consequence to him; if he won, it was a few sovereigns more in the pocket of a man who had already more money than he knew what to do with.

Philip rose from the table with haggard eyes, flushed face, and trembling hands. "I will redeem my scrap of paper in the morning," he remarked to his lordship.

"All right, old man: you will find me in the billiard-room about four o'clock," answered Camberley. "Only look here, there's no need to be in such a desperate hurry, you know." He had a dim suspicion that Philip was not over well off in money matters.

"I shall be in the billiard-room at four," retorted Philip with some hauteur. He resented the implication in Camberley's words—that perhaps it might not be convenient to pay the fifteen pounds so quickly. His poverty was a matter that concerned no one but himself.

As he walked home alone under the cold light of the stars, and went back in memory to the events of this evening and the last, they seemed to him nothing more than a wretched phantasmagoria, in which only the ghost of his real self had played a part. He was a loser to the extent of forty pounds. And where was he to raise the twenty-five pounds for Tiplady, or the fifteen for Camberley?

There was only one way—by applying to his friend Bootle. It was a disagreeable necessity, but Philip saw no help for it. Bootle was rich and generous, and would lend him the money in a moment. It would only be needed for a few days. The very first cheque he

drew, after coming into that twelve hundred pounds, should be one to repay Freddy.

And, thus easily settling difficulties, Mr. Philip finished up by vowing to himself that he would never touch another card.

CHAPTER XI.

A VISIT FROM MRS. CARLYON.

DR. SPRECKLEY felt like an angry man. When he read Squire Denison's curt note—curt as to the part of his dismissal—his first impulse was to go up to the Hall and demand an explanation from his old friend and patient. He had been forced into a corner as it were, been driven into telling a certain disagreeable truth, and now he was discarded for having done so, and a young practitioner of less experience and no note, was taken on in his place! It was very unjust. But Dr. Spreckley never did anything in a hurry. He put the Squire's note away, saying, "I'll sleep upon it."

On the morrow he found that Dr. Jago was really in attendance on the Squire. Dr. Spreckley met him on his way thither in a hired one-horse fly, and received a gracious wave of the hand by way of greeting. "I'll not interfere," exploded the old Doctor in the bitterness of his heart; "I'll never darken Denison's doors again. Unless he sends for me," he added a minute later. "And for all the good *he* can do him"—with a contemptuous glance after Jago—"that won't be long first."

Meanwhile, at the Hall, the Squire was soothing and explaining the change to Ella, who regarded it with dismay.

"I don't like Dr. Jago, Uncle Gilbert. And Dr. Spreckley was our friend of many years."

"And why don't you like Dr. Jago, lassie?"

"I don't know. There's something about him that repels me; it lies in his eyes, I think. I never spoke to him but once."

"When you know more of him, you will like him better," returned the Squire. "I am not sure that *I* like him much, personally. But if he cures me—what shall you say then? Come now!"

"I would say then that I should like him for ever," replied Ella, laughing.

"Well, child, he is hoping to do it. And I think he will."

"Is this true, Uncle Gilbert?"

The Squire patted her cheek. "What a disbelieving little girl it is! Jago is a wonderfully clever man, Ella; there's no doubt of that; he has studied in foreign schools, and he is about to try an entirely new kind of treatment upon me. He thinks it will turn up trumps, and so do I?"

Ella drew a long, relieved breath. "Oh I am so glad, dear uncle! I will make him welcome whenever he comes."

"It is a month to-day since I was outside the house," went on the Squire. "Jago tells me that he shall get me out again in three or four days. The man is a man of power; I see it, I feel it. Give him opportunity, and he will make a great name for himself. We will go about again as we used to, Ella; you and I. Why not?"

Ella's heart leaped; she believed the good news. Her uncle had seemed very poorly indeed lately, but she did not suspect he had any incurable malady, or that he was in any danger.

Dr. Jago came to Heron Dyke day after day. In a short while the Squire was walking about the grounds, leaning on Ella's arm or on Hubert Stone's; and he would be seen again driving through Nullington, his niece seated by his side. Ella had grown to think kindly of Dr. Jago; but that old vague feeling of dislike, or distrust, she could not quite get rid of. "There is a look in his eyes I never saw in the eyes of anyone else," she said to herself. "He interests me, and yet repels me."

"The Squire will last out yet to will away his property; ay, and longer than that," cried the gossips of the neighbourhood, as they watched the improvement in him. "It will take more than two doctors to kill a Denzon."

And thus October came in.

About the middle of that month the Squire sent an invitation to Mrs. Carlyon. It was partly in answer to a letter received from her—in which she told them that a certain projected plan of hers, that of going abroad for the winter, was still in abeyance, for she did not much like the idea of going alone. Higson would attend her of course: but who was Higson?—what she needed was a friend.

"She shall take you, Ella," said the Squire, after the letter of invitation was despatched.

"Take me, uncle! Oh dear, no."

"And why not, pray, when I say yes?"

"I could not leave you, Uncle Gilbert."

"Oh, indeed! Could you not, lassie?"

"Suppose you were to be taken ill—and I ever so many hundred miles away! Oh, uncle dear, how could you think of it!"

"Well, I hope I am not likely now to be taken ill. Jago is doing me a marvellous deal of good. Don't fear that. I should like you to go abroad for the winter, lassie, and if Gertrude Carlyon goes, we—we will see about it."

Mrs. Carlyon arrived in due course. It had previously been arranged that, if she did go abroad, she should come to them for a short visit first. It seemed to her that she saw a great change for the worse in Mr. Denison: but she was discreet enough to keep her thoughts on the matter to herself, and chose rather to congratulate him on looking so well.

"Ay," said he, complacently, "the new doctor understands me."

"And don't you think Dr. Spreckley did?" asked Mrs. Carlyon.

"Not of late. Spreckley could not do for me what this man will do."

On the second day of her visit, when they were alone, the Squire questioned Mrs. Carlyon about her plans for the winter. "Have you decided on them, Gertrude?" he asked.

"Not quite," she said. "I suppose, though, I shall go abroad, probably to the South of France. This climate tried my chest severely last winter."

"Ay, I remember. Best for you to go out of it for the next few months."

"An old friend of mine, Mrs. Ord, had decided to accompany me, and now circumstances have intervened to prevent it. That is why I hesitate. I don't care to go so far without a companion."

"You shall take Ella. Come now."

Mrs. Carlyon looked up eagerly. "Take Ella! Are you in earnest?"

"Never more so. Why not? I had meant to make you and London a present of her for the winter: if you go abroad, so much the better. It will be the greater change for her—and she needs change."

"I shall certainly no longer hesitate if I may have Ella," spoke Mrs. Carlyon gladly. "But—I should probably stay away four or five months."

"If you stay away six months it would be all the better. To tell you the truth, Gertrude," he continued, seeing Mrs. Carlyon look surprised, "I do not intend my pretty one to be here during the dark months, and you must take her out of my hands. She has never been quite the same since that curious affair up yonder"—pointing over his shoulder in the direction of the north wing.

Mrs. Carlyon began to understand. "You mean—about Katherine Keen?"

"Ay. Since the girl disappeared ——"

"What a most extraordinary thing that was!" interrupted Mrs. Carlyon. "Can you in any way account for it, Squire?"

"There's no way at all of accounting for it. Bodikins, no!"

"I meant, have you any private theory of your own—as to what can have become of her?"

"I know no more what could have become of her than *that*," returned the Squire, touching his stick, and then striking it on the ground to enforce emphasis. "It has troubled me above a bit, Gertrude, I can tell you. She was as nice and inoffensive a young girl as could be. Only the day before she disappeared she ran all across the garden to me to put my umbrella up, because a drop or two of rain began to fall. You can't think what a modest, kind, good little thing she was."

"I always thought it," assented Mrs. Carlyon. "And I esteem her mother; she is so hardworking and respectable. What a trial

it must have been for her, poor woman! I shall go in and see her before I leave."

"Ay. Why not? Well, it is altogether a very mysterious and unpleasant thing to have happened in this old house, and my pretty lassie, I see, does not forget it. She seems to mope, and to get a bit melancholy now and then. I fancy her eyes are not so bright as they used to be; she doesn't talk so much, or sing so much about the house. It's just as if there was always something hanging over her."

"Of course she must have a change," spoke Mrs. Carlyon.

"She was all the better for her visit to London in spring, but she was not long enough away," went on the Squire. "You know how lonely we are here. My health won't allow of my seeing much company, and Ella doesn't seem to care about extending her acquaintances. It will be horribly dull for her here this winter, with nobody in the house but a sick and cantankerous old man. I wish she could get right away out of England for six or eight months. She would come back to us next spring as merry as a blackbird. Why not, now?"

"I need not say how glad I should be to take Ella with me," said Mrs. Carlyon. "But there's one question—would she go?—would she leave you?"

"Odds bodikins!" cried the Squire angrily, "is the child to set up her will against mine—and yours? It is for her good—and, go she must."

"Do you think you are in a state to be left for a whole winter alone?" debated Mrs. Carlyon, remembering how greatly she at first thought him changed. "Will Ella think it?"

"I! why I am twenty per cent. better than I was a month ago. There's no fear for me. And, if I became ill at any time, couldn't you be telegraphed to? I say that Ella must have a change for her own sake; and what I say, I mean. Come now!"

"Yes; it would no doubt be better for her," assented Mrs. Carlyon, slowly; but, Mr. Denison thought, dubiously.

"Look here, Gertrude: for a woman you've got as sharp a share of sense as here and there one," cried he, lowering his tone as he bent forward towards her. "People have set up all kinds of superstitious notions about the affair; the women here hardly dare stir out of their kitchens after dusk. I find a notion prevails that Katherine is still in the house—is seen sometimes at her window at night. Now, as she can't be in the house alive, you—you must see what that means—folks are such fools, the uneducated ones. But, I put it to you, Gertrude—with this absurd nonsense being whispered about the house, whether it is fit the lassie should spend her winter in it? Eh, now, come!"

He glanced keenly for a moment at Mrs. Carlyon, as if to see whether his words impressed her. And they certainly had. "No it

is not," she assented, speaking firmly, "and I will take her out of it. But—you speak of the young women servants, I suppose, Gilbert? It is not at all seemly that they should be allowed to say such things. See Katherine at her window! How absurd! What next?"

"And profess to hear weird sounds about the passages, whisperings, and such like," added the Squire, as if he had pleasure in repeating this.

"What is Dorothy Stone about, to allow it?"

"Dorothy is worse than they are: she always was the most superstitious woman I ever knew. Not a step dare she stir about the house now after dark. Old Aaron is in a rare rage with her; threatens to shake her sometimes," added the Squire with a grim smile.

"There *can't* be anything in it, you know, Gilbert."

"I don't know," he answered: and Mrs. Carlyon stared at him. "After the disappearance of Katherine into—into air, as may be said, one may well believe any marvel. Eh, now," continued the Squire. "At any rate, Gertrude, it seems to me that we may forgive these poor ignorant people who do believe. But, to go back to the question: Heron Dyke is getting an ill name for mystery, see you, and I do not choose that my innocent lassie shall pass the winter in it."

"Quite right; I perceive all now, and I will take her out of it, Gilbert. At least for two or three of the dark months."

"Two or three months won't do," cried the Squire testily. "It would be of no use. She must not come back until the days are long and bright."

"Well, well, I see how anxious you are for her," said Mrs. Carlyon; who, however, could hardly feel it right to let him be so long alone. "In any case, you would like her to be home before your birthday."

The Squire did not answer. He seemed to be struggling with some inward emotion, and a curious spasm shot across his face. Mrs. Carlyon half rose from her chair, but sat down again.

"Why before my birthday?" said he at length. "It's no more to me than any other day. I never make a festival of it as some idiots do—as if it was something to rejoice over. She needn't come back for my birthday unless I send for her. I shall be sure to send if I want her."

"If you became worse—or weaker—you would send?"

"Ay, ay—why not? Does not one want dear ones by us in sickness? Not but, what with Jago's treatment, I seem to have taken a new lease of life. Look here: I should like the child to see Italy."

"And so she shall. And she will enjoy it, I am sure, provided she can make her mind easy at leaving you. Ella is not like other girls; she is more reasonable," added Mrs. Carlyon. "Look at some flighty young things—thinking of nothing but of getting married."

"Bodikins ! the women are generally keen enough after that, nowadays. Ella never seems to care for the young fellows. Young Hanerly wanted her, came to me about it ; but she'd have nothing to say to him. Whomsoever she marries, he will have to change his name to Denison. None but a Denison must inherit Heron Dyke."

The thought occurred to Mrs. Carlyon—and it was on the tip of her tongue to say it—that Ella's husband might not inherit Heron Dyke. If the ailing man before her did not live to his next birthday, it must all pass away from Ella. But she kept silence.

"I suppose you never by any chance hear from your cousin Gilbert ?" she presently asked, the train of thought prompting the question.

Mr. Denison's face darkened ; a cold, hard look came into his eyes. He turned sharply round and faced his questioner, but she was directly regarding the smouldering logs on the hearth. "Hear from my cousin Gilbert !" he said in deep harsh tones. "And pray why should I want to hear from him ? I would sooner receive a message from—from the commonest beggar. He would never have the impudence to write to me. Body 'o me ! Gilbert, forsooth ! He has his spies round the place night and day, I know that ; watching and waiting for the moment the breath will go out of me. But they will be deceived—they and their master : yes, Gertrude Carlyon, I tell you that they will be deceived ! I am not dead yet, nor likely to die. I shall live to see my seventieth birthday—I know it, I feel it—and not one acre of the old estates shall go to that man !"

He spoke with strange energy. It was evident that the old hatred towards his cousin still burned as fiercely in his heart as it had done forty years before.

"I am afraid that son of his will prove no credit to the name he bears," Mrs. Carlyon remarked after a pause : and the Squire looked up but did not speak. "I am told that some time ago he had a terrible quarrel with his father. They separated in anger and he has not been home since. He is supposed to have enlisted as a common soldier and gone out to India."

Mr. Denison gave a sort of savage snarl. "Ay, ay, that's good news—rare news," he said. "I would give that boy a thousand pounds to keep him away from his father if I only knew where he was—two thousand to anyone who could point out his grave. An only son too. Ah, ah ! Rare news !"

At that moment Dr. Jago came in. When he saw the Squire's face, he looked anything but pleased. "Madam," said he to Mrs. Carlyon, "this must not be. If Mr. Denison is to get permanently better, he must be kept free from excitement. It might counteract all the good I am doing him."

Mrs. Carlyon proposed a walk to Ella that lovely October afternoon, after making an enquiry or two in the household about the

unpleasant topic touched on by the Squire. The air was mellow and gracious; and they took their way to the sands, seating themselves on the very spot where Ella had once sat with Edward Conroy. Never did she sit there but she thought of him; of what he had said; of his looks and tones. She wondered whether he was in Africa; she wondered when she should hear of him.

It was low water, and where the vanished tide had been was now a tract of firm yellow sand with hardly a pebble in it; excellent to walk upon. Not till the solitude of the shore was about them did Mrs. Carlyon say a word to her companion on the subject that she had to break to her—their journeying together abroad.

Ella was astonished, hurt; perhaps even a little indignant. Could her uncle really wish her to leave him and to go away for so long when he needed companionship and care? Mrs. Carlyon quietly soothed her, persuaded, reassured her; and finally told her that it was *best it should so be*.

Allowing her niece to go in alone, Mrs. Carlyon turned her steps towards the little inn—the Leaning Gate. She had her curiosity about the doings of that past snowy night in February, just as other people had. The conversation with the Squire and with Dorothy Stone only served to whet it, to puzzle her more than ever, if that were possible; and to enhance her sympathy for poor Katherine's family.

Mrs. Keen was waiting upon a customer who had halted at the inn for the day; Susan had taken her work into the garden. Mrs. Carlyon found her there seated on a rustic bench; she was hemming some new chamber towels. It was a large and pretty garden, filled with homely flowers in summer and with useful vegetables. A great bush of Michaelmas daisies was in blossom now, near the end of the bench. Susan sat without a bonnet, and the sunlight fell on her smooth, brown hair, so soft and fine, just the same pretty hair that Katherine had: indeed, there had been a great resemblance between the sisters. She looked neat as usual—a small white apron on over her dark gown, a white collar at the neck. When she saw Mrs. Carlyon she got up to make her curtsy, and the tears filled her mournful grey eyes. That lady sat down by her and began to speak in a sympathising tone of the past trouble.

"It is not past, ma'am," said Susan, in answer to a remark; "it never will be."

"My good girl, I wanted to talk to you," said Mrs. Carlyon; "I came on purpose. What I have heard about you grieves me so much —" But here she stopped, for Mrs. Keen came running from the house to greet the visitor. The landlady was a comely woman with ample petticoats and a big white apron.

Naturally, there could be only the one theme of conversation. The tears ran down Mrs. Keen's ruddy cheeks as they pursued it; Susan

was pale, more delicate-looking than ever, and her eyes, dry now, had a far-off look in them. How greatly she put Mrs. Carlyon in mind of Katherine that lady did not choose to say.

"I can understand all your distress, all your trouble," spoke she in a sympathising tone. "And the *uncertainty* as to what became of her is the most cruel phase of all."

"*Something* must have interrupted her when she had just begun to undress; that seems to be evident, ma'am," said the mother. "She had taken off her cap and apron, her collar and ribbon—and all else that she had on disappeared with her. The question is, what that something could be. Susan thinks—but I'm afraid she thinks a great deal that is but idleness," broke off the mother, with a fond, pitying glance at the girl.

"What does Susan think?" asked Mrs. Carlyon.

Susan lifted her white face to answer. The vacant look it mostly wore was very perceptible now; her tone became dull and monotonous. "Ma'am," she said, "I think that when Katherine had just got those few things off, somebody came to her door, and—and ——"

"And what?" said Mrs. Carlyon, for the girl had stopped.

"I wish I knew what. I wish I could think what; but I can't. Some days I think he must have taken her out of the room, and some days I think he killed her in it. It fairly dazes me, ma'am."

"Whom do you mean by 'he'?" again questioned Mrs. Carlyon, wondering whether the girl had anyone in particular in her mind.

"It must have been some stranger, some wicked man that we don't know—or a woman," answered Susan, slowly. "Miss Winter had gone down then and was out of hearing."

"But there was no stranger at Heron Dyke that night, either man or woman," objected Mrs. Carlyon. "Only the women servants, old Aaron, the Squire, and Miss Winter."

"Somebody might have been hid in the house. She'd not go out of the room, ma'am, of her own accord."

"Not unless she had something to go for," said Mrs. Carlyon; "though I do not see what it was likely to be," she slowly added.

"Or, if she did go out, why did she not go back again?"

"Ma'am," spoke the landlady, "against that theory there's the fact that she left the candle behind her. Miss Winter found it burnt down to the socket. If she had gone out of the room she would have taken the light with her."

"It is a great mystery," mused Mrs. Carlyon. "What could have become of her? Where can she be?"

"She was hurt in some way, or else frightened," said Susan. "Screams of terror, those two were, that I heard."

"With regard to those screams," returned Mrs. Carlyon, "the singular thing is that no one else heard them; no one in the house."

"Tom Barnet heard them, ma'am, the coachman's boy," interposed the mother, smoothing down the sleeve of her lilac cotton gown. "I

can't think there's any doubt but that the screams came from Katherine. I'd give—I'd give all I'm worth to know where she is, dead or alive."

"She is inside Heron Dyke!" cried Susan, her voice taking a sound of awe.

"Nonsense," somewhat impatiently rebuked Mrs. Carlyon. "You ought to know that it cannot be, Susan."

Susan lifted her patient face, a pleading kind of look on it. "Ma'am, she's there; she's there. I've seen her at the window of her room in the moonlight; it's three times now."

"Run in, Susie; I thought I heard the gentleman's bell," spoke her mother, and Susan gathered up her work and went. But Mrs. Carlyon saw it was only a ruse to get rid of her.

"She is growing almost silly upon the point, ma'am," Mrs. Keen began; "thinking she sees her sister at the window. I believe it's all fancy, for my part; nothing but the reflection of some tree branches cast on the window-blind by the moon."

"Why don't you forbid her going up to Heron Dyke in the dark?" sensibly asked Mrs. Carlyon. "It cannot be good for her."

"Because, ma'am, I'm feared that if I did her mind would quite lose its balance," replied the mother. "I do stop her all I can; but I dare not do it quite always. The going up there to watch the windows for Katherine has become like meat and drink to her."

Mrs. Carlyon sighed. Throughout the interview the landlady had never ceased to wipe her tears away; they rose in spite of her. It was altogether a very distressing case, and Mrs. Carlyon wished it had occurred anywhere rather than at Heron Dyke.

"I suppose Katherine had no trouble? She was not in bad spirits?" she remarked.

"She had no trouble in the world that I know of; there was none that she could have. Susan met her in Nullington the morning of the very day it happened, and she was as blithe as could be. Miss Winter was making some flannel petticoats for the poor little neglected Tysons, and found she had not got enough flannel to cut out the last, so she sent Katherine for another yard of it, charging her to make haste. Well, ma'am, Susan met her, as I tell you; and, as Katherine was going back to the Hall, she saw me standing at the door here. 'I hear you have heard from John, mother,' she called out; and her face was bright and her voice cheerful as a lark's; 'Susan says she will bring me up the letter this evening.' 'Come in for it now, child,' I answered her. 'No,' she said, 'if I came in I should be sure to stop talking with you, and Miss Winter is waiting for what I've been to fetch. You'll let Susan bring it up this evening, mother.' 'If the weather holds up,' I answered, glancing at the skies, which seemed to threaten a fall of some sort; 'but her cold hangs about her, and I can't let her go out at night if rain comes on.' With that she nodded to me and ran on laughing; she used to think

it a joke, the care I took of Susan. No, ma'am," concluded the mother, "my poor Katherine was in no trouble of mind."

Mrs. Carlyon went back to the Hall full of thought. One thing she could not understand—how it was, if Katherine had screamed, that she should have been heard out of doors, and not indoors. And Mrs. Carlyon, that same evening, when she was dressing for dinner, sent Higson for Dorothy Stone, telling the maid she need not come back; and she put the question to Dorothy.

Mrs. Stone went into a twitter forthwith. The least allusion to the subject invariably sent her into one. No, the cry had not been heard indoors, she answered. Neither by the master nor Miss Ella, who were shut up in the oak sitting-room, nor by her and the maids in the kitchen. But the north wing was ever so far off, and she did not think they could have heard it. The only one about the house was Aaron, and he ought to have heard it, if any scream had been, screamed.

"And he did not hear it?" spoke Mrs. Carlyon.

"Aaron heard nothing, ma'am," replied the housekeeper. "The corridors and passages, above and below, were just as silent as they always are, inside this great lonely house at night; and that's as silent as the grave. Aaron was locking-up, and could well have heard any scream in the north wing. He was longer than usual that night, as it chanced, for he got his oil, and was oiling the front-door lock, which had grown a bit rusty. Had there been any noise in the north wing, screaming, or what not, he could not have failed to hear it; and for that reason he holds to it to this day that there was none; that the screams Susan Keen professed to hear were just her flighty fancy."

"And do you think so, Dorothy?"

"Ma'am, I don't know what to say," answered the old woman, pushing back her grey hair; as she was apt to do when in a puzzle of thought. "I should think it was the girl's fancy but for Tom Barnet. Tom holds to it that the two screams were there, sure enough, just as Susan does; the last a good deal fainter than the first."

"There's the dinner-gong!" exclaimed Mrs. Carlyon, as the sound boomed up from below. "And none of my ornaments on yet. Clasp this bracelet for me, will you, Dorothy. We will talk more of this another time. Dr. Jago dines here to-night, I hear; what a fancy the Squire seems to have taken to him!"

CHAPTER XII.

FAREWELL.

THE day of departure was here, bringing with it Ella's last afternoon at Heron Dyke for several weeks, or it might be, for several

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months to come. Her uncle's will in the matter, combined with Mrs. Carlyon's, had conquered her own. Dr. Jago added his influence in the shape of a warning, that his patient must on no account be irritated by contradiction or he would not be answerable for the consequences. Ella felt that there was no other course open to her than to yield; but she cried many bitter tears in secret. She did not want to leave home at all just now, although ten days or a fortnight in Paris might have proved a pleasant change. But to go away for a whole winter, and so far away too, was certainly something that she had never contemplated. It was true that Mr. Denison seemed better in health, much better; but, for all that, she had a presentiment which she could not get rid of, that if she left him now she should never see him again in this world. Still, she had to obey her uncle's wishes.

And now the last afternoon was here, and waning quickly. She had bidden farewell to Maria Kettle, to Lady Cleeve, and all other friends; she had taken her last walk along the shore, her last look at the garden and grounds, each familiar spot had been visited in turn; and it had seemed to her as though she were bidding them farewell for ever. She and Mrs. Carlyon were going up to London by the evening train; they would spend a couple of days in town and then cross by the Dover boat.

Through the leaden-paned windows of Mr. Denison's sitting-room the rays of the October sun shone wanly, lighting up a point of panelling here and there, or lending a momentary freshness, a forgotten grace, to one or other of the faded portraits on the walls. As the sick man sat there in his big leathern chair, his dim eyes wandered now and again to the motto of his family where, lighted by the sun, it shone out in colours blood-red and golden high up in the central window. There was a ring of worldly pride in the words, of the strength and the glory of possession. "What I have I hold." How much longer would he, the living head of the house, continue to hold anything of that which earth had given him? Already the cold airs of the grave blew about him: already he seemed to hear the dread words, "Ashes to ashes," while from the sexton's clay-stained fingers a little earth was crumbled on to his coffin lid. "What I have I hold." Vain mockery! when the grim Captain whispers in your ear, and bids you follow him.

Ella sat on a low hassock at her uncle's knee. One of her hands was tightly grasped in his, while his other hand stroked her hair fondly. It was a gaunt and bony hand and seemed all unfitted for such loving usages. They spoke to each other in low tones with frequent pauses between. To any stranger there, who could have heard their voices but not their words, it would have seemed as if they were discussing some trivial topic of every-day life. But both Ella and the Squire had determined that they would keep a strict guard over their feelings. Neither of them would let the other see

the emotions at work below, though each might guess at their existence. Dr. Jago had warned the young lady to make her parting as quiet a one as possible: excitement of any kind was so hurtful for him. Mr. Denison's proud hard nature could not entirely change itself even at a time like the present; besides which, he wanted to make the separation as little distressing to Ella as might be. It may be that he felt that if she were to break down at the last moment and betray much emotion, his own veneer of stoicism might not prove of much avail.

"I think, Uncle Gilbert, you understand clearly the arrangements made for our communicating with each other while I am away?" said Ella.

"I think so, my pretty one. You can go over them again if you like."

"I will write to you once a week and send you a telegram as often as we leave one place for another. Hubert Stone will write to me in your name every Monday to save you from fatigue; and you must write sometimes yourself. Should your health change in the slightest degree for the worse, he will telegraph to me without a moment's delay."

"That's it: I sha'n't forget," said Mr. Denison. "What with this telegraphing, and one thing or another, it will seem as if you were no further away than the next village."

"I shall feel that we are very far apart," said Ella. "You forget what a long time it takes to travel from Italy to Heron Dyke."

"Nothing like the time it used to take when I was a young spark. I remember when I went the grand tour as it was called—but there, there, we have something else to talk about now. Anyhow, railroads are a wonderful invention."

There were twenty things on Ella's tongue that she would have liked to speak of, but that it might be more wise to refrain from. Dr. Jago's warning words rarely left her thoughts.

"Be sure to wrap yourself up warmly when you go out in the carriage, uncle."

"Ay, ay, dearie, I won't forget."

"I shall come back to you the first week in the new year. Two months will be quite long enough to be away from home."

"We have agreed to see about that, you know, my lassie. I will send you word when I feel that I want you, and then you will come. Not before, I think—not before."

It was a topic that Ella dared not pursue further. She kissed his hand with tears in her eyes. He patted her cheek lovingly. "Oh! why does he persist so strongly in sending me away?" she thought. "Hubert let fall a word—an inadvertent one, I think—the other night, that they feared I should be melancholy in this gloomy old house in the winter. It is gloomy now, but I could have put up with that very well."

"If I get on as famously for the next month or two as I have for

the last three weeks," said the Squire, "I shall be able to drive to the station and meet you when you come home. And then when the sun comes out warm next spring, I can take your arm, and we can walk again in the peach alley as we used to do. Why not?"

Was there something wistful in his voice, as he spoke thus, that caused Ella to glance up quickly into his face? "Are you sure, uncle, that you are really as much stronger and better as you say you are?" she asked quickly, and with ill-concealed anxiety.

One of his old suspicious flashes came into his eyes: but it died away next moment. "Am I sure, dearie? Why—why, what makes you ask that? You can see for yourself that I'm better. Yes, Jago's making another man of me—another man."

"Tell me the truth, uncle," she exclaimed passionately, "*why* is it that you are driving me away? I am sure there is some special reason for it."

For a moment or two the Squire did not answer: his face was working with some inward excitement, his fingers, stroking the hand he held, trembled visibly.

"The house is getting uncanny, child," he said at last, "and I won't suffer my pretty one to be in it for the dark months. Before another winter comes round, perhaps the mystery will be solved; I hope it will be. Any way, we shall by that time have become more reconciled to it."

"But, uncle ——"

"No objection, my dear one. You have never made any to my will yet, and you must not begin now. Understand, child: I am sending you away for *the best*; the best for you and for me; and you must be guided by me implicitly, as you ever have been."

Ella sighed—and would not let him see her tears.

The yellow sunlight faded and vanished from the gloomy room, the old portraits on the walls shrank farther back into the twilight of their frames and were lost to view, the log on the hearth crackled and glowed more redly bright as darkness crept on apace, and still those two sat hand in hand, speaking a few words now and then, but mostly silent. At length the moment of departure came, the carriage was at the door, and Mrs. Carlyon entered, ready for travelling.

The Squire grasped the back of his chair with one hand; he was trembling in every limb. Mrs. Carlyon bade him good-bye quietly and without fuss. He kissed her, and held her hand. "Gertrude," he said, "into your hands I commit my one earthly treasure. I charge you with the care of it. Never forget!"

Ella clung to him, and laid her head upon his breast. His rugged features worked convulsively. He lifted her face tenderly between his hands, and kissed her several times. "Let me stay with you, uncle. Why drive me away?" she said imploringly.

For a moment there came into his eyes a gleam of agony terrible to see: it was a look which Ella never forgot. "No—no—it must

not be: I am doing for the best," he repeated, in a hoarse whisper; "I tell it you. Farewell, my sweetest and best—farewell. Go now—go now," he whispered, as he sank into his chair and pointed to the door.

Hubert Stone, looking every inch a gentleman, attended them to the station, sitting on the box with Barnet. Higson went inside with the ladies. At the station, Ella took Hubert aside for a private word.

"You will be sure not to forget your instructions, Hubert?"

"I shall not forget one of them, Miss Ella," was his answer. "You may rely upon that."

"You must watch my uncle narrowly. Should you see the approach of any change in him, telegraph to me. Question your friend, Dr. Jago, continually of his state. Say nothing to my uncle. I will take the responsibility if you send for me. You will always know where we are, for I shall keep you well-informed."

The young man bowed. He was afraid to let his eyes meet hers: she might perhaps have fathomed the burning secret that lay half hidden there—his passionate love.

"I trust you, Hubert; remember that: I have only you to trust to now at Heron Dyke. And now, good-bye."

Hubert clasped the hand she extended to him. And the next moment he assisted her into the carriage.

"Ah, if I might dare to think it would ever be!" he groaned, watching the train as it puffed out of the station. "And, I do think it may, I fear, more than is wholesome for me; for the hope is little short of madness."

At that time the county of Norfolk had been startled from its propriety by the ill-judged action of a young lady belonging to the family of one of its magnates. She had married one of her father's men-servants. Hubert Stone lit his cigar, and quitted the station to return home, thinking of this. Strange to say, he saw in it some encouragement for himself.

"If Miss G. can stoop to marry a low fellow like that, surely there's nothing so very outrageous in my aspiring to Ella Winter! I am well educated; I can behave as a gentleman; I am good-looking. There's nothing against me but birth—and fortune. *She* will have enough of the latter if she comes into Heron Dyke—and if Jago's clever, I expect she will. Any way her fortune will be a fair one, for the Squire must have saved hoards of money. She can well afford to dispense with money in whomsoever she may marry: and if she can only be brought to overlook the disadvantage of my birth —"

"Good evening, Mr. Stone. And how's the Squire?"

Hubert's dreams were thus cut short. He answered the question mechanically, and stopped to talk to the chance acquaintance who had accosted him.

Meanwhile Ella and Mrs. Carlyon were speeding London-ward as fast as the Great Eastern Railway could carry them. At Cambridge

there was a stoppage for two or three minutes. Suddenly Mrs. Carlyon uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"Ella, look! Look there! that is surely Mr. Conroy. He is looking for a seat."

Ella bent forward. The next moment Mr. Conroy recognised them. He advanced to the carriage window, and raised his hat.

"Who, in the name of wonder, expected to see you here?" exclaimed Mrs. Carlyon, as she held out her hand. "I thought you were in Ashantee."

"It is one of my privileges to turn up in unexpected places," he answered. Then he shook hands with Ella and enquired after Mr. Denison.

"Were you looking for a place?—are you going to town?" asked Mrs. Carlyon. "If you don't mind travelling with unprotected females, there's plenty of room here."

And, thanking her, into the carriage stepped Edward Conroy, with the frank look and smile that Ella remembered so well.

"Well, if he is not a cool one!" thought the discerning Higson to herself. "I'd not mind answering for it that in some way he got to know Miss Ella would be here, and came down from town on purpose to meet her. I can read it in his eyes. There's no answering for what these venturesome young gents will do!"

"And will you kindly explain to us, Mr. Conroy, what business you have to be in England when you ought to be sketching black people out in Africa?"

"Within twenty-four hours of the time I was to have sailed, I received a telegram informing me that my father was dangerously ill. Under the circumstances, I could not sail; I had to go to him instead. I stayed some time with him, left him better, and then found that Dempster had been sent in my place."

"And a very fortunate thing too."

Conroy laughed. "You lack enterprise, Mrs. Carlyon. I am afraid that you would never do for a special correspondent. Do you expect to make a long stay in London this time?" he asked, turning to Ella.

"We intend starting for the Continent the day after to-morrow," answered Mrs. Carlyon. "You had better come and dine with us to-morrow evening: there will be no one but ourselves and Mr. Bootle."

"I shall be very happy to do so," replied Conroy. "What place are you going to make your head-quarters while you are away?"

"I had some thoughts of San Remo, but we shall probably be birds of passage and not stay long in any one place."

Conroy saw that Ella was silent, and guessed the parting with her uncle had been a sad one. What he did not know was, how sweet his presence and company were to her. She had been thinking of him that very day—thinking of him sadly as of one whom she might never see again; and now he was here, sitting opposite to her. What

rare chance had brought him?—She did not talk much, she was satisfied to hear his voice and see his face; at present she craved nothing more. The journey she so much dreaded had all at once been invested with a charm, with an unexpected sweetness, which she never tried to analyse: enough for her that it was there.

Conroy saw the ladies into their carriage at the London terminus, and bade them good-bye till the following evening.—Then he lighted a cigar and set out to walk to his rooms in the Adelphi. He was in a musing mood, debating some question with himself as he walked along.

"Shall I tell Mrs. Carlyon a certain secret, or shall I not?" he thought. "Would she keep it to herself? No, no; better be on the safe side," he presently decided: "and the time is hardly ripe to tell it to anyone. What would Squire Denison say if it were whispered to him?"

On this very evening, while these ladies were on their way to London, a strange thing happened at Heron Dyke.

It was about eight o'clock. Fitch the saddler had come up from Nullington about some little matter of business, and Aaron Frost sent one of the housemaids to fetch him a certain whip that was hanging in the hall. As Martha left the room with her candle she met her fellow-servant, Ann, and the latter turned to accompany her. The girls never cared to go about the big house singly after dark. They went along chattering merrily, and thinking of anything rather than unpleasant subjects. Martha was repeating a ludicrous story just told in the kitchen by the saddler, and could hardly tell it for laughing.

As in many old mansions, round three sides of the entrance hall there ran an oaken gallery, some twenty-feet above the ground, from which various doors gave access to different parts of the house. This gallery was reached from the hall by a broad and shallow flight of stairs.

"How cold this place always strikes one," exclaimed Ann as they entered the hall.

"It would want many a dozen of candles to light it up properly," remarked Martha.

Having found the whip, they turned to retrace their steps, when Martha, happening to glance up at the gallery, gave utterance to a low cry, and grasped her companion by the arm. Ann's eyes involuntarily followed the same direction, and a similar cry of intense terror burst from her lips.

They saw the face of the missing girl—the face of Katherine Keen, gazing down upon them from the gallery. The face was very pale; white as that of the dead. The figure was leaning over the balustrade of the gallery and its eyes gazed down into theirs with a sad, fixed, weary look. It seemed to be clothed in something dark, pulled partly over its head and grasped at the throat by the white, slender

fingers. For fully half a minute, the two girls stood and stared up at the figure in sheer incapability, and the figure looked sadly down upon them. At length it moved—it turned—it took a step forward, and the servants, both of them, distinctly heard the sound of a faint far-away sigh. Could it be possible that the figure meant to come down stairs? The spell that had held the girls was broken; with low smothered cries of terror they turned and fled, clinging to each other.

How the one dropped the whip and the other the candle, and how they at length gained the kitchen, and burst into it with their terror-stricken faces and their unhappy tale, they never knew. Fitch the saddler gazed in open-eyed amazement, as well he might; the deaf and stolid cook looked in from the cooking-kitchen—in which congenial place she preferred to sit, surrounded by her saucepans.

The girls sobbed forth all the dismal story. Their mistress, Mrs. Stone, flung her apron over her head as she listened, and sank back in her chair in dismay equal to theirs. But old Aaron was so indignant, so scandalised, at what he called their imaginative folly, that he lost his breath in a rage, and gave each of them a month's warning on the spot.

(To be continued.)



CUCKOO SONG.

CUCKOO ! cuckoo ! in dawning daylight calling,
When white mists cling to river-beds and reeds ;
Cuckoo ! cuckoo ! when evening shades are falling,
Again your voice along the twilight meads.

It rains ! sharp hailstone balls in laurel arches
Storm, rattle, patter, and the clouds hang near ;
While hidden from sight, 'mid slender aisles of larches,
You hopeful call monotonously clear.

It shines ! smile bravely, earth, in all your splendour ;
Green lawns and lilies greet the wooing sun :
Cuckoo ! cuckoo ! in tones half-gay, half-tender,
Sing to the world that summer is begun.

So sings my love, too, rain or shiny weather ;
She, like the cuckoo, soft voiced, changes not.
So sing, sweetheart, while we two walk together,
With chequered storm and sunshine for our lot !

G. B. STUART.

VERENA FONTAINE'S REBELLION.

IT was a dreadful thing to have happened. Edward Pym found dead; and no one could tell for a certainty who had been the author of the calamity.

He had died of a blow dealt to him, the doctors said: it had struck him behind the left ear. Could it be possible that he had fallen of himself, and struck his head against something in falling, was a question put to the doctors—and it was Captain Tanerton who put it. It perhaps might be possible, the medical men answered, but not at all probable. Mr. Pym could not have inflicted the blow upon himself, and there was no piece of furniture in the room, so far as they saw, that could have caused the injury, even though he had fallen upon it.

The good luck of the *Rose of Delhi* seemed not to be in the ascendant. Her commander could not sail with her now. Neither could her newly appointed third mate, Alfred Saxby. So far as might be ascertained at present, Captain Tanerton was the last man who had seen Pym alive; Alfred Saxby had found him dead; therefore their evidence would be required at the official investigation.

Ships, however, cannot be lightly detained in port when their time for sailing comes: and on the day following the events already told of, the *Rose of Delhi* finally left the docks, all taut and sound, the only one of her old officers, sailing in her, being Mark Ferrar. The brokers were put out frightfully at the detention of Tanerton. A third mate was soon found to replace Saxby: a master not so easily. They put in an elderly man, just come home in command of one of their ships. Put him in for the nonce, hoping Captain Tanerton would be at liberty to join her at Dartmouth, or some other place down channel.

On this same day, Tuesday, the investigation into the events of that fatal Monday, as regarded Edward Pym, was begun. Not the coroner's inquest: that was called for the morrow: but an informal inquiry instituted by the brokers and Sir Dace Fontaine. In a back room of the office in Eastcheap, the people met; and—I am glad to say—I was one of them, or I could not have told you what passed. Sir Dace sat in the corner, his elbow resting on the desk and his hand partly covering his face. He did not pretend to feel the death as an affectionate uncle would have felt it; still Pym was his nephew, and there could be no mistake that the affair was troubling him.

Mrs. Richenough, clean as a new pin, in her Sunday gown and close bonnet, a puzzled look upon her wrinkled face, told what

she knew—and was longer over it than she need have been. Mr. Pym, who lodged in her parlour floor, had left her for good, as she supposed, on the Monday morning, his ship, the *Rose of Delhi*, being about to go out of dock. Mr. Saxby, who had lodged in the rooms above Mr. Pym, got appointed to the same ship, and he also left. In the afternoon she heard that the ship had got off all right: a workman at the docks told her so. Later, who should come to the door but Mr. Pym—which naturally gave her great surprise. He told her the ship had sprung a leak and had put back; but they should be off again with the next day's tide, and he should have to be abroad precious early in the morning to get the cargo stowed away again —

"What time was this?" interrupted Mr. Freeman.

"About half-past four, I fancy, sir. Mr. Pym spoke rather thick—I saw he had been taking a glass. He bade me make him a big potful of strong tea—which I did at once, having the kettle on the fire. He drank it, and went out."

"Go on, Mrs. Richenough."

"An hour afterwards, or so, his captain called, wanting to know where he was. Of course, sirs, I could not say; except that he had had a big jorum of tea, and was gone out."

Captain Tanerton spoke up to confirm this. "I wanted Pym," he said. "This must have been between half-past five and six o'clock."

"About nine o'clock; or a bit earlier, it might be—I know it was dark and I had finished my supper—Mr. Pym came back," resumed the landlady. "He seemed in an ill-humour, and he had been having more to drink. 'Light my lamp, Mother Richenough,' says he roughly, 'and shut the shutters: I've got a letter to write.' I lighted the lamp, and he got out some paper of his that was left in the table-drawer, and the ink, and sat down. After closing the shutters I went to the front door, and there I saw Captain Tanerton. He asked me —"

"What did he ask you?" cried Mr. Freeman's lawyer, for she had come to a dead standstill.

"Well, the Captain asked me whether any young lady had been there. He had asked the same question afore, sir: Mr. Pym's cousin, or sister, I b'lieve he meant. I told him No, and he went into the parlour to Mr. Pym."

"What then?"

"Well, gentlemen, I went back to my kitchen, and shut myself in by my bit o' fire; and, being all lonely like, I a'most dozed off. Not quite; they made so much noise in the parlour, quarrelling."

"Quarrelling?" cried the lawyer.

"Yes, sir; and were roaring out at one another like wolves. Mr. —"

"Stay a moment, ma'am. How long was it after you admitted Captain Tanerton that you heard this quarrelling?"

"Not above three or four minutes, sir. I'm sure of that. 'Mr. Pym's catching it from his captain, and he is just in the right mood to take it unkindly,' I thought to myself. However, it was no business of mine. The sounds soon ceased, and I was just dozing off again, when Mr. Saxby came home. He went into the parlour to see Mr. Pym, and found him lying dead on the floor."

A dead pause.

"You are sure, ma'am, it was Captain Tanerton who was quarrelling with him?" cried the lawyer, who asked more questions than all the rest put together.

"Of course I am sure," returned Mrs. Richenough. "Why, sir, how could it be anybody else? Hadn't I just let in Captain Tanerton to him? Nobody was there but their two selves."

Naturally the room turned to Jack. He answered the mute appeal very quietly.

"It was not myself that quarrelled with Pym. No angry word of any kind passed between us. Pym had been drinking; Mrs. Richenough is right in that. He was not in a state to be reprov'd or reasoned with, and I came away at once. I did not stay to sit down."

"You hear this, Mrs. Richenough?"

"Yes, sir, I do; and I am sure the gentleman don't speak or look like one who could do such a deed. But, then, I heard the quarrelling."

An argument indisputable to her own mind. Sir Dace looked up and put a question for the first time. He had listened in silence. His dark face had a wearied look on it, and he spoke hardly above a whisper.

"Did you know the voice to be that of Captain Tanerton, Mistress Landlady? Did you recognise it for his?"

"I knew the voice couldn't be anybody else's, sir. Nobody but the Captain was with Mr. Pym."

"I asked you whether you *recognised* it?" returned Sir Dace, knitting his brow. "Did you know by its tone that it was Captain Tanerton's?"

"Well, no, sir, I did not, if you put it in that way. Captain Tanerton was nearly a stranger to me, and the two shut doors and the passage was between me and him. I had only heard him speak once or twice before, and then in a pleasant, ordinary voice. In this quarrel his voice was raised to a high, rough pitch; and in course I could not know it for his."

"In point of fact, then, it comes to this: You did *not* recognise the voice for Captain Tanerton's."

"No, sir; not, I say, if you put it in that light."

"Let me put it in this light," was Sir Dace Fontaine's testy rejoinder: "Had three or four people been with Mr. Pym in his parlour, you could not have told whose voice it was quarrelling with him? You would not have known?"

"That is so, sir. But, you see, I knew it was his captain that was with him."

Sir Dace folded his arms and leaned back in his chair, his cross-questioning over. Mrs. Richenough was done with for the present, and Captain Tanerton entered upon his version of the night's events.

"I wished particularly to see Mr. Pym, and went to Ship Street in search of him, as I have already said. He was not there. Later, I went down again ——"

"I beg your pardon, Captain Tanerton," interrupted the lawyer; "what time do you make it—that second visit?"

"It must have been nearly nine o'clock. Mr. Pym was at home, and I went into his parlour. He sat at the table writing, or preparing to write. I asked him the question I had come to ask, and he answered me. Scarcely anything more passed between us. He was three-parts tipsy. I had intended to tell him that he was no longer chief mate of my ship—had been superseded; but, seeing his condition, I did not. I can say positively that I was not more than two minutes in the room."

"And you and he did not quarrel?"

"We did not. Neither were our voices raised. It is very probable, in his then condition, that he would have attempted to quarrel had he known he was discharged; but he did not know it. We were perfectly civil to each other; and when I wished him good-night, he came into the passage and shut the front door after me."

"You left no one with him?"

"No one; so far as I saw. I can answer for it that no one was in the parlour with us: whether anyone was in the back room I cannot say. I do not think so."

"After that, Captain Tanerton?"

"After that I went straight to my hotel in the Minories, and ordered tea. While taking it, Mr. Ferrar came in and told me Edward Pym was dead. I could not at first believe it. I went back to Ship Street and found it too true. In as short a time as I could manage it, I went to carry the news to Sir Dace Fontaine, taking young Saxby with me."

Jack had spoken throughout in the ready, unembarrassed manner of one who tells a true tale. But never in all my life had I seen him so quiet and subdued. He was like one who has some great care upon him. The other hearers, not knowing Jack as I knew him, would not notice this; though I cannot answer for it that one of them did not—James Freeman. He never took his eyes off Jack all the while; peered at him as if he were a curiosity. It was not an open stare; more of a surreptitious one, taken stealthily from under his eyebrows.

Some testimony as to Pym's movements that afternoon was obtained from Mrs. Ball, the lawyer having already been to Woburn Place to get it. She said that young Pym came to her house between five

and six o'clock—nearer six than five, she thought, and seemed very much put out and disappointed to find Miss Verena Fontaine had left for her own home. He spoke of the ship's having sprung a leak and put back again, but he believed she would get out again on the morrow. Mrs. Ball did not notice that he had been drinking; but one of her servants met him in the street after he left the house, heard him swearing to himself, and saw him turn into a public-house. If he remained in it until the time he next appeared in Ship Street, his state then was not to be wondered at.

This was about all that had been gathered at present. A great deal of talking took place, but no opinion was expressed by anybody. Time enough for that when the jury met on the morrow. As we were turning out of the back room, the meeting over, Mr. Freeman put his hand upon Jack, to detain him. Jack, in his turn, detained me.

"Captain Tanerton," he said, in a grave whisper, "do you remember making a remark to me not long ago, in this, my private room—that if we persisted in sending Pym out with you in the ship, there would be murder committed?"

"I believe I do," said Jack, quietly. "They were foolish words, and meant nothing."

"I do not like to remember them," pursued Mr. Freeman. "As things have turned out, it would have been better that you had not used them."

"Perhaps so," answered Jack. "They have done no harm, that I know of."

"They have been singularly verified. The man has been murdered."

"Not on board the *Rose of Delhi*."

"No. Off it."

"I should rather call it death by misadventure," said Jack, looking calmly at the broker. "At the worst, done in a scuffle; possibly in a fall."

"Most people, as I think you will find, will call it murder, Captain Tanerton."

"I fear they will."

Mr. Freeman stood before Jack, waiting—at least it struck me so—to hear him add, 'But I did not commit it'—or words to that effect. I waited too. Jack never spoke them: he remained silent and still. Since the past day his manner had changed. All the light-hearted ease had gone out of it; the sunny temperament seemed exchanged for thought and gloom.

Fine tidings to travel down to Timberdale!

On Wednesday, the day following this, the Squire stood at the gate of Crabb Cot before breakfast, looking this way and that. Dark clouds were chasing each other over the face of the sky, now

obscuring the sun, now leaving it to shine out with intense fierceness.

"It won't do to-day," cried the Squire. "It's too windy, Joe. The fish would not bite."

"They'd bite fast enough," said Tod, who had set his mind upon a day's fishing, and wanted the Squire to go with him.

"Feel that gust, Joe! Why, if—halloa, here comes Letsom!"

Colonel Letsom was approaching at the pace of a steam-engine, his mild face longer than usual. Tod laughed.

The Colonel, never remembering to say How d'ye do, or to shake hands, dragged two letters out of his pocket, all in a flurry.

"Such fearful news, Todhetley!" he exclaimed. "Pym—you remember that poor Pym?"

"What should hinder me?" cried the Squire. "A fine dance we had, looking for him and Verena Fontaine the other night in London! What of Pym?"

"He is dead!" gasped the Colonel. "Murdered."

The Pater took off his spectacles, thinking they must affect his hearing, and stared.

"And it is thought," added the Colonel, "that—that Captain Tanerton did it."

"Good mercy, Letsom! You can't mean it."

Colonel Letsom's answer was to read out portions of the two letters. One of them was written to his daughter Mary Ann by Coralie Fontaine; three sheets full. She gave much the same history of the calamity that has been given above. It could not have been done by any hand but Captain Tanerton's, she said; though of course not intentionally; nobody thought that: her father, Sir Dace, scorned any worse idea. Altogether, it was a dreadful thing; it had struck Verena into a kind of wild despair, and bewildered them all. And in a postscript she added what she had apparently forgotten to say before—that Captain Tanerton denied it.

Tod looked up, a flush on his face. "One thing may be relied upon, Colonel—that if Tanerton did do it, he will avow it. He would never deny it."

"This other letter is from Sir Dace," said the Colonel, after putting Coralie's aside. And he turned round that we might look over his shoulder while he read it.

It gave a much shorter account than Coralie's; a *lighter* account, as if he took a less grave view of the affair; and it concluded with these words. "Suspicion lies upon Tanerton. I think unjustly. Allowing that he did do it, it could only have been done by a smartly-provoked blow, devoid of ill-intention. No one knows better than myself how quarrelsome and overbearing that unfortunate young man was. But I, for one, believe what Tanerton says—that he was not even present when it happened. I am inclined to think that Pym, in his

unsteady state, must in some way have fallen when alone, and struck his head fatally."

"Sir Dace is right; I'll lay my fortune upon it," cried Tod warmly.

"Don't talk quite so fast about your fortune, Joe; wait till you've got one," rebuked the Pater. "I must say it is grievous news, Letsom. It has upset me."

"I am off now to show the letters to Paul," said the Colonel. "It will be but neighbourly, as he is a connection of the Fontaines."

Shaking hands, he turned away on the road to Islip. The Squire, leaning on the gate, appeared to be looking after him: in reality he was deep in a brown study.

"Joe," said he, in a tone that had a sound of awe in it, "this is curious, taken in conjunction with what Alice Tanerton told us yesterday morning."

"Well, it does seem rather queer," conceded Tod. "Something like the dream turning up trumps."

"Trumps?" retorted the Pater.

"Truth, then. Poor Alice!"

A singular thing had happened. Especially singular, taken in conjunction (as the Squire put it) with this unfortunate news. And when the reader hears the whole, though it won't be just yet, he will be ready to call out, It is not true. But it is true. And this one only fact, with its truth and its singularity, induced me to recount the history.

II.

ON Tuesday morning, the day after the calamity in Ship Street—you perceive that we go back a day—the Squire and Tod turned out for a walk. They had no wish to go anywhere in particular, and their steps might just as well have been turned Crabb way as Timberdale way—or, for that matter, any other way. The morning was warm and bright: they strolled towards the Ravine, went through it, and so on to Timberdale.

"We may as well call and see how Herbert Tanerton is, as we are here," remarked the Squire. For Herbert had a touch of hay-fever. He was always getting something or other.

The Rector was better. They found him pottering about his garden; that prolific back garden from which we once saw—if you don't forget it—poor, honest, simple-minded Jack bringing strawberries on a cabbage-leaf for crafty Aunt Dean. The suspected hay-fever turned out to be a bit of a cold in the head: but the Rector could not have looked more miserable had it been in the heart.

"What's the matter with you now?" cried the Squire, who never gave in to Herbert's fancies.

"Matter enough," he growled in answer: "to have a crew of ridiculous women around you, no better than babies! Here's Alice in a world of a way about Jack, proclaiming that some harm has happened to him."

"What harm? Does she know of any?"

"No, she does not know of any," croaked Herbert, flicking a growing gooseberry off a bush with the rake. "She says a dream disclosed it to her."

The Pater stared. Tod threw up his head with a laugh.

"You might have thought she'd got her death-warrant read out to her, so white and trembling did she come down," continued Herbert in an injured tone. "She had dreamt a dream, foreshadowing evil to Jack, she began to tell us—and not a morsel of breakfast could she touch."

"But that's not like Alice," continued the Squire. "She is too sensible: too practical for such folly."

"It's not like any rational woman. And Grace would have consoled with her! Women infect each other."

"What was the dream?"

"Some nonsense or other, you may be sure. I would not let her relate it, to me, or to Grace. Alice burst into tears and called me hard-hearted. I came out here to get away from her."

"For goodness' sake don't let her upset herself over a rubbishing dream, Tanerton," cried the Squire, all sympathy. "She's not strong, you know, just now. I dreamt one night the public hangman was appointed to take my head off; but it is on my shoulders yet. You tell her that."

"Yesterday was the day Jack was to sail," interrupted Tod.

"Of course it was," acquiesced the Rector: "he must be half-way down channel by this time. If—Here comes Alice!" he broke off. "I shall go. I don't want to hear more of such stuff."

He went on down the garden in a huff, disappearing behind the kidney-beans. Alice, wearing a light print gown and black silk apron, her smooth brown hair glossy as ever, and her open face as pretty, shook hands with them both.

"And what's this we hear about your tormenting yourself over a dream?" blundered the Squire. Though whether it was a blunder to say it, I know not; or whether, but for that, she would have spoken: once the ice is broken, you may plunge in easily. "My dear, I'd not have thought it of *you*."

Alice's face took a deeper gravity, her eyes a far-off look. "It is quite true, Mr. Todhetley," she sighed. "I have been very much troubled by a dream."

"Tell it us, Alice," said Tod, his whole face in a laugh. "What was it about?"

"That you may ridicule it?" she sighed.

"Yes," he answered. "Ridicule it out of you."

"You cannot do that," was her quiet answer: and Tod told me in later days that it rather took him aback to see her solemn sadness. "I should like to relate it to you, Mr. Todhetley. Herbert would not hear it, or let Grace."

"Herbert's a parson you know, my dear, and parsons think they ought to be above such things," was the Squire's soothing answer. "If it will ease your mind to tell it me—Here, let us sit down under the pear tree."

So they sat down on the bench under the blossoms of the pear tree, the Pater admonishing Tod to behave himself; and poor Alice told her dream.

"I thought it was the present time," she began. "This very present day, say, or yesterday; and that Jack was going to sea in command——"

"But, my dear, he always goes in command."

"Of course. But in the dream the point was especially presented to my mind—that he was going out *in command*. He came to me the morning of the day he was to sail, looking very patient, pale, and sorrowful. It seemed that he and I had had some dispute, causing estrangement, the previous night: it was over then, and I, for one, repented of the coldness."

"Well, Alice?" broke in Tod: for she had stopped, and was gazing out straight before her.

"I wish I could show to you how *real* all this was," she resumed. "It was more as though I were wide awake, and enacting it. I never had so vivid a dream before; never in all my life."

"But why don't you go on?"

"Somebody had been murdered: some man. I don't know who it was—or where, or how. Jack was suspected. Jack! But it seemed that it could not be brought home to him. We were in a strange town; at least, it was strange to me, though it seemed that I had stayed in it once before, many years ago. Jack was standing before me all this while, you understand, in his sadness and sorrow. It was not he who had told me what had happened. I seemed to have known it already. Everybody knew it, everybody spoke of it, and we were in cruel distress. Suddenly I remembered that when I was in the town the previous time, the man who was murdered had had a bitter quarrel with another man, a gentleman: and a sort of revelation came over me that this gentleman had been the murderer. I went privately to some one who had authority in the ship, and said so; I think her owner. He laughed at me—did I know how high this gentleman was, he asked; the first magnate in the town. That he had done it I felt sure; surer than if I had seen it done; but no one would listen to me—and in the trouble I awoke."

"That's not much to be troubled at," cried the Squire.

"The trouble was terrible; you could not feel such in real life. But I have not told all. Presently I got to sleep again, and found

myself in the same dream. I was going through the streets of the town in an open carriage, the ship's owner with me ——"

"Was the ship the *Rose of Delhi*?"

"I don't know. The owner, sitting with me in the carriage, was not either of the owners of the *Rose of Delhi*, whom I know well; this was a stranger. We were going over a bridge. Walking towards us on the pavement, I saw two gentlemen arm-in-arm: one an officer in a dusky old red uniform and cocked-hat; the other an *evil*-looking man who wore a long brown coat. He walked along with his eyes on the ground. I knew him by intuition—that it was the man who had had the quarrel years before, and who had done the murder now. 'There's the gentleman you would have accused,' said my companion before I could speak, pointing to this man: 'he stands higher in position than anybody else in the town.' They walked on in their security, and we drove on in our pain. I ought to say in my pain, for I alone felt it. Oh, I cannot tell you what it was—this terrible pain; not felt so much, it seemed, because my husband could not be cleared, as for *his* sadness and sorrow. Nothing like it, I say, can ever be felt on earth."

"And what else, Alice?"

"That is all," she sighed. "I awoke for good then. But the pain and the fear remain with me."

"Perhaps, child, you are not very well?—been eating green gooseberries, or some such trash. Nothing's more likely to give one bad dreams than unripe fruit."

"Why should the dream have left this impression of evil upon me—this weight of fear?" cried Alice, never so much as hearing the Pater's irreverent suggestion. "If it meant nothing, if it were not come as a warning, it would pass from my mind as other dreams pass."

Not knowing what to say to this, the Squire said nothing. He and Tod both saw how useless it would be; no argument could shake her faith in the dream, and the impression it had left.

The Squire, more easily swayed than a child, yet suspecting nothing of the news that was on its way to Timberdale, quitted the rectory and went home shaking his head. Alice's solemn manner had told upon him. "I can't make much out of the dream, Joe," he remarked, as they walked back through the Ravine; "but I don't say dreams are always to be ridiculed, since we read of dreams sent as warnings in the Bible. Anyhow, I hope Jack will make a good voyage. He has got home safe and sound from other voyages: why should he not from this one?"

Before that day was over, they saw Alice again. She walked over to Crabb Cot in the evening with her little girl—a sprightly child with Jack's own honest and kindly eyes. Alice put a sealed paper into the Squire's hand.

"I know you will think me silly," she said to him, in a low tone

"perhaps gone a little out of my senses; but, as I told you this morning, nothing has ever impressed me so greatly and so unpleasantly as this dream. I cannot get it out of my mind for a moment; every hour, as it goes by, only serves to render it clearer. I have written it down here, every particular, more minutely than I related it to you this morning, and I have sealed it up, you see; and I am come to ask you to keep it. Should my husband ever be accused, it may serve to ——"

"Now, child, don't you talk nonsense," interrupted the Pater. "Accused of what?"

"I don't know. I wish I did. I hope you will pardon me, Mr. Todhetley," she went on, in deprecation; "but indeed there lies upon me a dread—an apprehension that startles me. I daresay I express myself badly; but it is there. And, do you know, Jack has lately experienced the same sensation; he told me so on Sunday. He said it was like an instinct of coming evil."

"Then that accounts for it," cried the Squire, considerably relieved, and wondering how Jack could be so silly, if she was. "If your husband told you that, Alice, of course the first thing you'd do would be to go and dream of it."

"Perhaps so. What he said made no impression on me; he laughed as he said it: I don't suppose it made much on him. Please keep the paper."

The Squire carried the paper upstairs and locked it up in the little old walnut bureau in his bedroom. He told Alice where he had put it. And she, declining any refreshment, left again with little Polly for Timberdale Rectory.

"Has Herbert come to?" asked Tod laughingly, as he went to open the gate for her.

"Oh, dear no," answered Alice. "He never will, if you mean as to hearing me tell the dream."

They had a hot argument after she left: Mrs. Todhetley maintaining that some dreams were to be regarded as sacred things; while Tod ridiculed them with all his might, asserting that there never had been, and never could be anything in them to affect sensible people. The Squire, now taking one side, now veering to the other, remained in a state of vacillation, something like Mahomet's coffin hovering between earth and Heaven.

And, you will now readily understand that when the following morning, Wednesday, Colonel Letsom brought the Squire the news of Pym's death, calling it murder, and that Jack was suspected, and the ship had gone out without him, this dream of Alice Tanerton's took a new and not at all an agreeable prominence. Even Tod, sceptical Tod, allowed that it was "queer."

On this same morning, Wednesday, Alice received a letter from her husband. He spoke of the mishap to the ship, said that she had put back, and had again gone out; he himself being detained in London

on business, but he expected to be off in a day or two and join her at some place down channel. But not a word did he say of the cause of his detention, or of the death of Edward Pym. She heard it from others.

With this confirmation, as it seemed, of her dream, Alice took it up more warmly. She went over to the old lawyer at Islip, John Paul, recounted the dream to him, and asked what she was to do. Naturally, old Paul told her "nothing": and he must have laughed in his sleeve as he said it.

III.

THE good ship, *Rose of Delhi*, finally went away with all her sails set for the East; but John Tanerton went not with her.

The inquest on the unfortunate young man, Pym, was put off from time to time, and prolonged and procrastinated. Captain Tanerton had to wait its pleasure; the ship could not.

The case presented difficulties, and the jury could not see their way to come to a verdict. Matters looked rather black against Captain Tanerton; that was not denied; but not sufficiently black, it would seem, for the law to lay hold of him. At any rate, the law did not. Perhaps the persistent advocacy of Sir Dace Fontaine went some way with the jury. Sir Dace gave it as his strong opinion that his misguided nephew, being the worse for drink, had fallen of himself, probably with his head on the iron fender, and that Captain Tanerton's denial was a strictly true one. The end finally arrived at was—that there was not sufficient evidence to show how the death was caused.

At the close of the investigation Jack went down to Timberdale. Not the open-hearted, ready-handed Jack of the old days, but a subdued, saddened man who seemed to have a care upon him. The foolish speech he had thoughtlessly made to Mr. Freeman preceded him: and Herbert Tanerton—always looking on the darkest side of everything and everybody, considered it a proof that Jack had done the deed.

Timberdale (including Crabb) held opposite opinions; half of it taking Captain Tanerton's side, half the contrary one. As to the Squire, he was more helpless than an old sheep. He had always liked Jack, had believed in him as in one of us: but, you see, when one gets into trouble, faith is apt to waver. A blow, argued the Pater in private, is so easily given in the heat of passion.

"A pretty kettle of fish this is," croaked Herbert to Jack, on his brother's arrival.

"Yes, it is," sighed Jack.

"The ship's gone without you, I hear."

"She had to go. Ships cannot be delayed to await the convenience of one man: you must know that, Herbert."

"How came you to do it, John?"

"To do what?" asked Jack. "To stay? It was no fault of mine. I was one of the chief witnesses, and the coroner would not release me."

"You know what I mean. Not that. How came you to do it, I ask?"

"To do what?" repeated Jack.

"Kill Pym."

Jack's face took a terrible shade of pain as he looked at his brother. "I should have thought, Herbert, that you, of all people, might have judged me better than that."

"I don't mean to say you did it deliberately; that you meant to do it," returned the Rector in his coldest manner. "But that was a very awkward threat of yours—that if the brokers persisted in sending Pym out with you, there'd be murder committed. Very incautious!"

"You can't mean what you say; you cannot surely reflect on what you would imply—that I spoke those words with intention!" flashed Jack.

"You did speak them—and they were verified," contended Herbert. Just the same thing, you see, that Mr. Freeman had said to Jack in London. Poor Jack!

"How did you hear that I had said anything of the kind?"

"Somebody wrote it to Timberdale," answered the parson, crustily. There could be no question that the affair had crossed him more than anything that had ever happened in this world. "I think it was Coralie Fontaine."

"I am deeply sorry I ever spoke them, Herbert—as things have turned out."

"No doubt you are. The tongue's an evil and dangerous member. Let us drop the subject: the less it is recurred to now, the better."

Captain Tanerton saw how it was—that all the world suspected him, beginning with his brother.

And he certainly did not do as much to combat the feeling as he might have done. This was noticed. He did not assert his innocence strenuously and earnestly. He said he was not guilty, it's true, but he said it too quietly. A man accused of so terrible a crime would move heaven and earth to prove the charge false—if false it were. Jack denied his guilt, but denied it in a very tame fashion. And this had its effect upon his upholders.

There could be no mistaking that some inward trouble tormented him. His warm, genial manners had given place to thoughtfulness and care. Was Jack guilty?—his best friends acknowledged the doubt now, in the depths of their heart. Herbert Tanerton was worrying himself into a chronic fever: chiefly because disgrace was reflected on his immaculate self, Jack being his brother. Squire Todhetley, meeting Jack one day in Robert Ashton's cornfield, took Jack's hands in his, and whispered that if Jack did strike the blow unwittingly, he knew it was all the fault of that unhappy, cross-

grained Pym. In short, the only person who retained full belief in Jack was his wife. Jack had surely done it, said Timberdale under the rose, but done it unintentionally.

Alice related her dream to Jack. Not being given to belief in dreams, Jack thought little of it. Nothing, in fact. It was no big, evil-faced man who harmed Pym, he answered, shaking his head; and he seemed to speak as one who knew.

Timberdale was no longer a pleasant resting-place for John Tanerton, and he quitted it for Liverpool, with Alice and their little girl. Aunt Dean received him coolly and distantly. The misfortune had put her out frightfully: with Jack's income threatened, there would be less for herself to prey upon. She told him to his face that if he wanted to correct Pym, he might have waited till they got out to sea: blows were not thought much of on board ship.

The next day Jack paid a visit to the owners, and resigned his command. For, he was still attached ostensibly to the *Rose of Delhi*, though another master had temporarily superseded him.

"Why do you do this?" asked Mr. Charles Freeman. "We can put you into another ship, one going on a shorter voyage, and when your own comes home you can take her again."

"No," said Jack. "Many thanks, though, for your confidence in me. All the world seems to believe me guilty. If I were guilty I am not fit to command a ship's crew."

"But you were not guilty?"

More emphatically than Jack had yet spoken upon the affair, he spoke now: and his truthful, candid eyes went straight into those of his questioner.

"I was not. Before Heaven, I say it."

Charles Freeman heaved a sigh of relief. He liked Jack, and the matter had somewhat troubled him.

"Then, Captain Tanerton—I fully believe you—why not reconsider your determination, and remain on active service? The *Shamrock* is going to Madras; sails in a day or two; and you shall have her. She'll be home again before the *Rose of Delhi*. For your own sake I think you should do this—to still rancorous tongues."

Jack sighed. "I can't feel free to go," he said. "This suspicion has troubled me more than you can imagine. I must get some employment on shore."

"You should stand up before the world and assert your innocence in this same emphatic manner," returned the owner. "Why have you not done it?"

Jack's voice took a tone of evasion at once. "I have not cared to do it."

Charles Freeman looked at him. A sudden thought flashed into his mind.

"Are you screening some one, Captain Tanerton?"

"How can you ask such a question?" rejoined Jack. But the

deep and sudden flush that rose with the words, gave fresh food for speculation to Mr. Freeman. He dropped his voice.

"Surely it was not Sir Dace Fontaine who—who killed him? The uncle and nephew were not on good terms."

Jack's face and voice brightened again—he could answer this with his whole heart. "No, no," he impressively said, "it was not Sir Dace Fontaine. You may at least rely upon that."

When I at length got back to Crabb, the Fontaines were there. After the inquest, they had gone again to Brighton. Poor Verena looked like a ghost, I thought, when I saw her on the Sunday in their pew at church.

"It has been a dreadful thing," I said to her, as we walked on together after service; "but I am sorry to see you look so ill."

"A dreadful thing!—ay, it has, Johnny Ludlow," was her answer, spoken in a wail. "I expect it will kill some of us."

Sir Dace looked ill too. His furtive eyes had glanced hither and thither during the service, like a man who has a scare upon him; but they seemed ever to come back to Verena.

Not another word was said by either of us until we were near the barn. Then Verena spoke.

"Where is John Tanerton?"

"In Liverpool, I hear."

"Poor fellow!"

Her tone was as piteous as her words, as her looks. All the bloom had gone from her pretty face; its lips were white, dry, and trembling. In Coralie there was no change; her smiles were pleasant as ever, her manners as easy. The calamity had evidently passed lightly over her; as I expect most things in life did pass.

Saying good-morning at the turning, Sir Dace and Verena branched off to Maythorn Bank. Coralie lingered yet, talking with Mr. Todhetley.

"My dear, how ill your father is looking!" exclaimed the Squire.

"He does look ill," answered Coralie. "He has never been quite the same since that night in London. He said one day that he could not get the sight of Pym out of his mind—as he saw him lying on the floor in Ship Street."

"It must have been a sad sight."

"Papa is also, I think, anxious about Verena," added Coralie. "She has taken the matter to heart in quite an unnecessary manner; just, I'm sure, as if she intended to die over it. That must vex papa: I see him glancing at her every minute in the day. Oh, I assure you I am the only cheerful one of the family now," concluded Coralie, lightly, as she ran away to catch the others.

That was the last we saw of them that year. On the morrow we left for Dyke Manor.

In the course of the autumn John Tanerton ran up to Timberdale

from Liverpool. It had come to his knowledge that the Ash Farm, belonging to Robert Ashton, was to let—Grace had chanced to mention it incidentally when writing to Alice—and poor Jack thought if he could only take it his fortune was made. He was an excellent, practical farmer, and knew he could make it answer. But it would take two or three thousand pounds to stock the Ash Farm, and Jack had not as many available shillings. He asked his brother to lend him the money.

"I always knew you were deficient in common sense," was the Rector's sarcastic rejoinder to the request. "Three thousand pounds! What next?"

"It would be quite safe, Herbert: you know how energetic I am. And I will pay you good interest."

"No doubt you will—when I lend it you. You have a cheek!"

"But ——"

"That will do; don't waste breath," interrupted Herbert, cutting him short. And he positively refused the request—refused to listen to another word.

Strolling past Maythorn Bank that same afternoon, very much down in looks and spirits, Jack saw Sir Dace Fontaine. He was leaning over his little gate, looking just as miserable as Jack. For Sir Dace to look out of sorts was nothing unusual; for Jack it was. Sir Dace asked what was amiss: and Jack—candid, free-spoken, open-natured Jack—told of his disappointment in regard to the Ash Farm: his brother not feeling inclined to advance him the necessary money to take it—£3,000.

"I wonder you do not return to the sea, Captain Tanerton," cried Sir Dace.

"I do not care to return to it," was Jack's answer.

"Why?"

"I shall never go to sea again, Sir Dace," he said in his candour.

"Never go to sea again!"

"No. At any rate, not until I am cleared. While this dark cloud of suspicion lies upon me I am not fit to take the command of others. Some windy night insubordinate men might throw the charge in my teeth."

"You are wrong," said Sir Dace, his countenance taking an angry turn. "You know, I presume, your own innocence—and you should act as if you knew it."

He turned back up the path without another word, entered his house, and shut the door. Jack walked slowly on. Presently he heard footsteps behind him, looked round, and saw Verena Fontaine. They had not met since the time of Pym's death, and Jack thought he had never seen such a change in anyone. Her bright colour was gone, her cheeks were wasted,—a kind of dumb despair sat in her once laughing blue eyes. All Jack's pity—and he had his share of it—went out to her.

"I heard a little of what you said to papa at the garden-gate, Captain Tanerton—not much of it. I was in the arbour. *Why* is it that you will not yet go to sea again? What is it you wait for?"

"I am waiting until I can stand clear in the eyes of men," answered Jack, candid as usual, but somewhat agitated, as if the topic were a sore one. "No man with a suspicion attaching to him should presume to hold authority over other men."

"I understand you," murmured Verena. "If you stood as free from suspicion with all the world as you are in my heart, and—and"—she paused from emotion—"and I think in my father's also, you would have no cause to hesitate."

Jack took a questioning glance at her; at the sad, eager eyes that were lifted beseechingly to his. "It is kind of you to say so much," he answered. "It struck me at the time of the occurrence that you could not, did not, believe me guilty."

Verena shivered. As if his steady gaze were too much for her, she turned her own aside towards the blue sky.

"Good-bye," she said faintly, putting out her hand. "I only wanted to say this—to let you know that I believe in your innocence."

"Thank you," said Jack, meeting her hand. "It is gratifying to hear that *you* do me justice."

He walked quietly away. She stood still to watch him. And of all the distressed, sad, *aching* countenances ever seen in this world, few could have matched that of Miss Verena Fontaine.

JOHNNY LUDLOW.

(Concluded next month.)

ABOUT NORWAY.

BY CHARLES W. WOOD, AUTHOR OF "THROUGH HOLLAND."



BETWEEN TUNE AND SKOGSTAD.

NORWAY may certainly be described as a very irregular country. Not, let us hasten to add, in the matter of its morals, which I believe are unexceptionable, but in its physical aspect. Long stretches of flat, level roads are almost unknown; and the great upheavals of Nature, which we call mountains, are well nigh as diversified in outline

at their base as at their summit. The roads undulate; now in gentle lines which seem to serve no other purpose than to give the horse an excuse for crawling, and of which he makes the most—now suddenly rising in steep ascents which require both fortitude and perseverance to scale.

The reader will remember that we parted from Mr. and Miss B. at the foot of the Baegna Bridge: that after handshakes increased and multiplied on the part of Mr. B., who alighted from his carriage, and danced a species of war dance in the road, as he capered from one carriage to another, showering down upon us the while all kinds of good wishes for our future happiness and prosperity in Norway: and handwaves and kindly glances from his sister: the angle of the road at length took them from our sight, and we saw them no more.

We now began the ascent of a winding mountain path, steep and long—the ascent of the Jukamsklev. The road had been cleared out of the mountain in zigzags, and the scenery as we went upwards was of untold beauty. We obtained grand views of the rushing torrent, and as we mounted high and higher, our gaze seemed carried into precipitous depths. Not far from here is the church

of Lom, dating back to the thirteenth century, built of resinous pine wood in the Byzantine style, and tarred over from time to time until the wood has become hard as iron and almost imperishable. But we could not visit it, what had still to be done would admit of no delay on the road. As it was, the shadows were lengthening, and that peculiar look was creeping over the sky, which announces as surely as a sun-dial that the day is on the wane.

It was now my turn to receive the burden of leadership, and though perfectly helpless and innocent, I very soon felt myself quite a miserable culprit. Do what I would, my horse would not go beyond a snail's pace: he did not even walk, but crawled. In truth it was difficult to wish him to do anything more lively up this tremendous ascent. But hungry and weary—I cannot conclude a harrowing picture by adding footsore—it was no doubt exasperating to A., whose animal, with the perverseness of Norwegian horses, required as much holding in as mine did urging. Yet the affliction had to be endured. For my own part heroically, for at every turn fresh beauties disclosed themselves or old ones showed up in a new aspect. Pine-clad hills: a view more and more extended as we neared the summit: a rushing torrent below us, into which we could look as into a shuddering depth by simply leaning to the left and gazing breathlessly at the living, leaping torrent. To our right, trees clothed the mountain, and the eye could wander up into the depths of tangle and briar, the slanting shadows thrown by the sun, the gloom beyond, into which no sight could penetrate. Ahead of us we could see but a very short distance, so short and steep were the windings; so that the pleasures of hope—that every turn would prove the last—accompanied us on our way.

We gained the summit at last, and were rewarded by a magnificent view of mountain ranges, range upon range, snow hills in the distance, far as the eye could reach. Below, stretched the great valley, with its plains and villages, its lakes opening out, on which small islands and trees and ducks disported themselves. This Valley of Valdres is one of the grandest and most extensive views in Norway, with its vast range, its far-away snow-capped mountains, its repose and solemn solitude. And now the mountain we had just ascended seemed literally to laugh at us, for no sooner had we gained the summit on the one side than we had to commence a descent upon the other. Down we went, by the same winding process—zigzag paths, cut and cleared out of the mountain. But if we had ascended deliberately, we came down at a speed which had in it a mixture of compensation, recklessness, and exhilaration, at once delightful and renovating. In the far distance we could just see the snow-mountains of Jotunheim, and passed on as quickly as possible to the next station, Frydenlund. This was ten and a half miles from the last station, Vold, and we had been very little short of three hours in accomplishing the distance.

Frydenlund seemed, by comparison, a very civilized and decent station; and we found that by waiting half an hour we could be served with quite a sumptuous repast—also by comparison. A lad belonging to the station, the son of the hostess, spoke just enough English to understand our requests—very humbly preferred on our part, for hunger as well as conscience makes cowards of us all. In a short time we found ourselves in Elysium, though not exactly reveling in nectar and ambrosia: and certainly not on Olympus, since we were in the valley.

Frydenlund is a somewhat important village, as villages go in Norway, possessing a whole staff of judicial dignitaries, including the Foged, or chief administrative official; the Sorenskriver, or local judge, and the Lensmand, the chief constable already alluded to, who pays periodical visits to the different stations in the district, inspects the way-books, and comes down upon all sorts of offenders with the strong arm of the law. The reader will not be surprised to hear, after this, that the district prison is not very far off. It is a large white building, so beautifully situated, so clean and orderly, that captivity within its walls should scarcely be looked upon as punishment.

The room in which our banquet was served was large, and, for a station, luxurious. Plants flourished in the windows and on the floor: great fuchsias and gorgeous geraniums, whose leaves threw out a subtle and delicious perfume. Excepting the wild flowers of the woods, our eyes had long been strangers to floral beauties of any sort, and these threw quite a glory into the room and turned it into a small paradise. A view fit for paradise, too, was that to be seen from the windows. The village in the plain; the long valley; the lakes studded with their small islands and waving trees; the opposite mountains, stretching away far as the eye could trace, down which ran great waterfalls; the deep clefts, where sight was lost in the blackness of night. All this we noted with delight, as soon as we had eyes and thoughts for the beautiful. For if, according to the French proverb, "*Ventre affamé n'a point d'oreilles*," it is equally true that under the like conditions we can no more appreciate the beauties of nature than we can listen to the strains of music or the powers of oratory.

Yet contrary opinions have been expressed. I remember a lady once saying that she should like to live upon crystallized orange-blossoms (we were sitting down to supper, and some of the dainty confection was upon the table). The food was so poetical: anything less refined destroyed all that was æsthetical in one's nature. A gentleman opposite—whose name was then, and is now, in the first rank of poets—took up her remark, and said very openly and decidedly that he thought a good leg of mutton far more to the purpose, and for his part he preferred it. The lady opened her round eyes in affected horror, and then closed them in faintness, at such a want of the poetical in so unexpected a quarter; and she

whispered me that none of her family ever saw her eat: it was too vulgar: too gross and unspiritualizing: "all *that* was done] in the privacy of her own room.

This same lady, later in the evening, informed me that she thought the most delightful thing in the world must be to fly across the desert on the back of a dromedary—though why she preferred a dromedary to a camel, I did not stay to enquire. The feeling of unlimited space was *so* poetical—she was again among the poets—the sensation of fleeing from the vulgar herd of mankind was so soul-soaring in its influence! Here she landed me out of my depth; understanding collapsed, and only returned in time to see the lady disappearing from sight in a cloud: but when fully aroused to consciousness, I found the cloud was only of Shetland manufacture. And though Shetland may be the end of the earth, we have no reason whatever for supposing that it is the end nearest to heaven.

We had one more station to reach that night, and darkness was creeping on apace as we started on our last stage. We ascended the long hill and gradually rose far above the valley, which lay sleeping below us, with the village and the lakes and the islands. Across one of them a boat was darting, sculled by a boy, and so far off did it seem, and so tiny, that until we brought our glasses to bear upon it, we took it to be a swan sailing majestically away to its home. Everything was growing indistinct, and the far-off snow mountains were now invisible. Beside us the hills rose as far above the road to the right, as the valley was below us on the left. Cataracts here and there ran down the sides and could be heard "making music"—very lovely music it was—when they could no longer be seen, or only dimly traced in the gathering gloom, by a white, silvery thread, writhing and twisting like a thing of life, standing out in contrast with the gloomy blackness of the trees, and the dark surface of the mountains.

At about half-past ten at night, after twelve hours' almost incessant travelling, the post-boy with his peculiar twang—the sing-song tone of the Norwegians—cried out "Fagernaes!" a sound just then as welcome as June roses, and pointed to something ahead that could only be faintly discovered in the darkness. Sombre pine trees were about us, wrapped in the silence, and mystery of the hour. Out of these we issued, turned through a wide gate into an open space, the house loomed up before us, and in a few moments we were at anchor.

The landlord was at once at the door, and welcomed us hospitably. We found ourselves in a building that possessed quite the dignity of a small hotel; rough as regarded the staircase and sleeping rooms, but not without pretensions, and luxurious in comparison with our late experiences. The landlord, as he ushered us upstairs, informed us in very good English that we had the house to ourselves with the exception of three Dutchmen. Terrible exception, indeed,

though we knew it not then. You think at once, dear reader, that we were robbed or murdered by these Dutchmen, but you are wrong. They were only off before us the next morning, and during the remainder of that week were ahead of us on the road, taking up horses and carriages, devouring everything before them like an army of locusts, and behaving to everyone they met with the greatest possible impoliteness. In the end they were voted a perfect nuisance by all, and a disgrace to their country.

If anyone wishes to know what it is to have a night of sound, refreshing sleep, let him take as a prescription twelve hours' carriage travelling in Norway. The remedy is unfailing.

At the breakfast table the next morning, the host informed us that the three Dutchmen had been gone about an hour, and we did not realize the importance of this apparently commonplace announcement. A pretty and quite refined-looking young woman waited upon us. I have never seen anyone who did this with such extraordinary quietness. She moved about with no more noise than a cat; until A. declared she gave him an uncanny, creepy feeling that was positively unpleasant. We were exercised in our minds as to whether she was the landlord's wife or sister, and came at last to the conclusion that she must be the former.

This house, once the station, is no longer so. The station, *Fagerlund*, is a hundred yards further up the road, and also receives travellers: our inn was *Fagernaes*. It is a favourite place of resort in summer, and is often full of visitors. Beautifully situated on the borders of the lake, our host informed us that it furnishes excellent trout fishing, and some wild-duck shooting. The surrounding views for many a long mile are charming, and for this alone a few days or a week might be pleasantly spent here. Small islands here, too, were dotted about the water, and willows hung gracefully and pensively over the banks. At *Fagernaes*, the rough and the wild in Norwegian scenery had given place to the sentimental and the refined.

The whole of that day's journey was a succession of beautiful scenes, varying in character, from the sublime and the severe to the quiet and unemotional. Now passing a wayside village or solitary cottage, out of which the dogs would spring barking with a furious noise that made us thankful that dogs are scarce in Norway: whilst the few villagers, the men with short jackets and gay waistcoats, and hats like sugar-cones, stopped their work to gaze after the wayfarers, with less curiosity no doubt than in days gone by. Now we passed through long avenues of trees, that shut out the broad sunlight, which threw slanting shadows athwart our path. Still the road undulated, like the long rollers of an Atlantic sea, and one could almost imagine that here the ocean had once found its home. To our left were the calm waters of the *Strandefjord*; but here and there the calmness was turned to a rushing torrent which leaped down many feet in white, seething foam, breaking over huge boulders, and

forcing its way through crevices in countless small cataracts, turning mill wheels, and giving work to men whose lives in these sublime scenes of nature should be inspired with a like grandeur of thought and sentiment. Only we know how familiarity with beauty at length takes from its influence: the eyes seem to be withheld: until an interruption or an absence restores the magic with the return.

Throughout the day grand mountains were about us. Now vast pine forests fringed the summits and stood out like some delicate fretwork of nature against the clear blue background; and now clear-cut outlines of more barren hills seemed to cut the sky sharply in twain. The first station we came to was Reien, against which we shall have a dark record in due time and place. Here we were in the neighbourhood of the Jotumheim, the highest mountains in Norway; and excursions lasting over a week may be made by those who love the excitement of danger, and are indifferent to fatigue.

Half-way between Reien and Stee, the next station, we passed, high up on the hill-side, a comfortable looking hotel, so beautifully situated, that the very sight of it has left a longing to go back some day, and spend a month there, exploring the lovely neighbourhood, seeking out the reindeer, and passing whole days in trout fishing or wild-duck shooting.

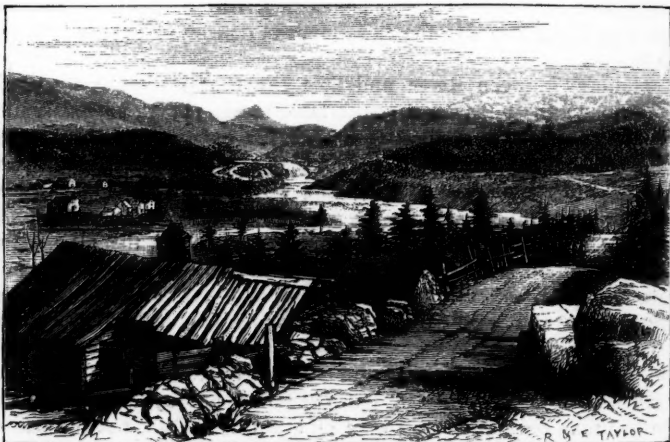
After Stee came Oilö, situated on the slope of the mountains. The fat, good-natured landlady came out and patted our horses, and lamented that we had driven them too fast. This was evidently her weak point, about which she had hallucinations. We had come at quite a solemn pace—by compulsion and not of preference—and the little horses were as fresh as when they started. They were not very first-rate to begin with, but even now not a hair was turned. In less than ten minutes we were off again from Oilö, but not before the good woman had affectionately hugged her cattle, and commended them to our care.

Much of the road between Oilö and the next station, Tune, was cut out of the solid rock, and bordered the lake, whose deep, dark waters looked cold and repelling; and every now and then a sharp angle in the road confronted us with a solid mass of rock, which concealed the way, and seemed to bar all further progress save a descent into the water. Occasionally we passed through short tunnels, blasted out of the solid stone, which suddenly transported us from the heat of the sun to a cold dripping atmosphere, from which we were glad to escape.

After a drive of about six miles through such scenery we reached Tune, a station celebrated all over Norway from the fact of its owner being a member of Parliament—and by no means a silent one either. We turned off the road up a steep narrow lane, all ruts and stones, and at a distance of some two hundred yards came to the house. Tune, himself, was away, perhaps looking after his parliamentary

duties, and the place seemed to be in charge of women folk. The first sight to greet us was a view of the three Dutchmen, who had taken possession of the whole room, chairs, tables and couches, but who departed five minutes after our entrance, having during that time behaved with as much indirect rudeness as could be condensed into the moments. They went off with the only available carriages in the place, exulting aloud at the manner in which they had left those who would follow after to less good fortune than their own.

The serving woman, a good-looking, middle-aged maiden, was wonderfully attentive, pressed all kinds of good things upon us, was distressed that we did not make an end of everything, and charged us very moderately at the last. As a return for so much attention



NEAR FAGERNAES.

and friendly feeling, we offered her on our departure a gratuity which we thought only too small, but which she considered so out of proportion to her due, that in the humblest and most grateful manner she tendered us back a portion thereof. How many would possess this tender conscience in more civilized parts of the world?

Some weeks later on when we again visited the station, the woman recognised us in a moment, and greeted us quite as old friends. A beaming smile lit up her comely face; she rushed to the day-book, found our names all those weeks back, and pointed them out triumphantly. Then she turned to the Dutchmen's signatures, just above our own, and made a face and a gesture expressive of dislike and contempt. The landlord himself was at home this time; was very obliging, and pretended to be nothing more than he really was. At home, to his guests at any rate, he was evidently not the member

of Parliament, but simply the master of the station. He spoke English fairly well, and begged us to return later on in the year, and bring a party with us if possible, to shoot bears, which were a nuisance to the neighbourhood. Capital sport might be had, and he would do his best to make people comfortable. But this is dating forward.

As the carriages were out, we each had to put up with a *stolkjaer*, to our sorrow, for the next stage was one of twelve miles. The road was yet wilder than that which had gone before. A wonderful piece of engineering skill, patience and labour, cut out of the solid rock, and skirting the edge of the lake. Again we occasionally passed through a tunnel, and here and there, where small cataracts ran down the mountain side, a long wooden shed was erected, to cover the



CHURCH OF BORGUND.

road and protect the traveller, and conduct the waterfall into the lake. But the drops filtered through, and these little diversions were so many shower-baths; refreshing, perhaps, but not agreeable.

In one place, I remember well, the road took a sharp turn to the left, the waters narrowed into a small channel, and on either side rose huge perpendicular mountains of rock, of towering height and frowning aspect, absolutely bare of the slightest verdure. Then, as the road turned, the lake opened out, basin-like, grand mountains developed themselves, and threw their shadows upon the dark, cruel-looking water. The effect of all this was heightened by the utter solitude of the whole district; the travelling mile after mile, hour after hour, in the midst of such grand scenes, yet never seeing a creature; the solitude unbroken even by the flight of a bird. Here, indeed, eagles might make their homes, unmolested by man, and wing their flight from peak to peak, as safe as in a desert land. The

road was narrow; so narrow in parts that the edge was bordered by railings of pine wood, strong and massive.

Soon after this, amidst the utmost grandeur of mountain height and solitude, we began to ascend. This we did for some distance, until at length we crossed a long wooden bridge to our right, and in a few moments found ourselves at Skogstad. Bennet had given us a stage further on for that day; but it was now late; the three Flying-Dutchmen were ahead with the horses, and the landlord said it would take some time to get others down from the hills: we, on our part, were glad of an excuse for cutting short our journey, and decided to remain there the night. The station is grandly situated in the midst of the gloomy yet beautiful mountains, the stream ever rushing past through the valley.

The civil landlord spoke excellent English, but raised our compassion and keenest sympathies. We presently heard, in the kitchen below, a shrew laying down the law, and elevating her voice with a harsh, grating sound, that penetrated to the very centre of one's nerves. If ever man was hen-pecked it must have been the unhappy lord and master of that voice—as it seemed to us. Let us hope we were mistaken; but though people sometimes say that black is white, they do not think it. It is difficult to disbelieve the evidence of one's senses. Solomon has said, the rod for the child: he is silent about the wife: and we would not for a moment have it supposed that we encourage such an idea, or offer it for universal consideration: but in this instance, had we found the man taming the shrew with the aid of a broomstick, I doubt if we should have died of grief or even blushed for shame. After all, the line must be drawn somewhere, and human sympathies have their limits.

Our host was tall, meek, and pale-faced, and what force of character he once possessed had evidently long since frightened itself away. Why will men for ever go on making these mistakes—the dove mating with the eagle, the wolf with the lamb, and other incongruities and incompatibilities too numerous to mention? Is it because, as Pope says, "Man never is, but always to be blest"? In such cases, however, does it not come to being something very near the opposite? We afterwards learned that this woman, when the fit took her, would do absolutely nothing for the comfort of the visitors.

The next morning for breakfast we succeeded in getting nothing better than black bread and bad coffee—no doubt because the woman had not recovered her amiability. Nevertheless we were glad to have stopped the night at Skogstad, and should do it again if ever we passed that way. In situation it is far more beautiful than Nystuen, the next station, and it possesses a new, good-sized, comfortable building which the enterprising landlord has erected for the accommodation of travellers.

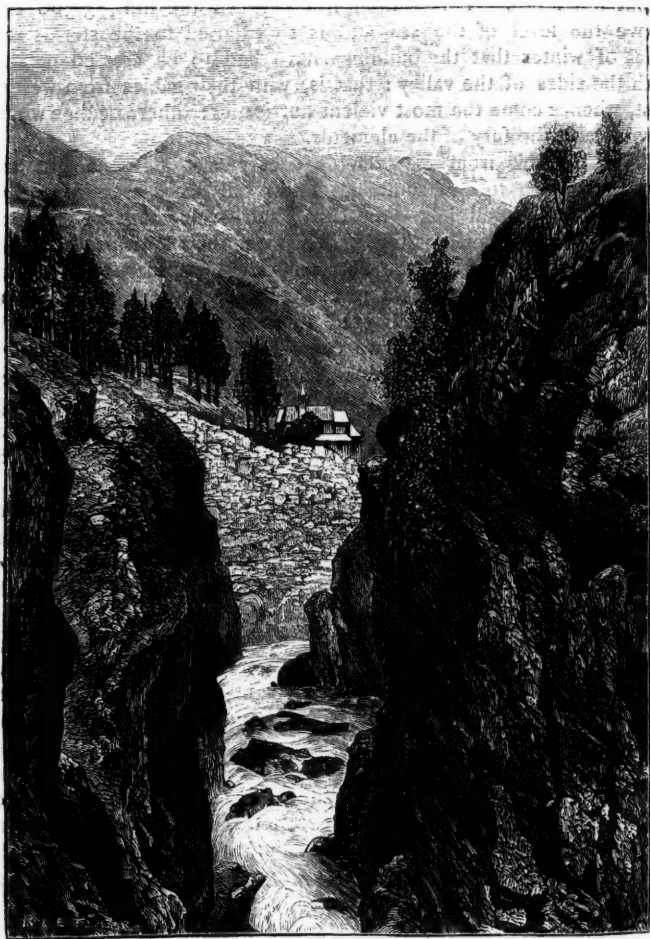
So we started once more on our journey. The ascent to Nystuen was steep, continuous, and long. It was here that the ascent to the

Fille-Fjeld commenced. Vegetation became more and more barren and stunted the higher we climbed, the fir trees, of which we had had so many, giving place to the birch and mountain willow. We were nearly two hours and a half reaching Nystuen, a distance of about ten miles. This station lies between the hills, 3,300 feet above the level of the sea, and is so exposed to the storms and gales of winter that the buildings have had to be erected parallel with the sides of the valley: that is, with their gables from west to east, whence come the most violent hurricanes: otherwise they would never stand the fury of the elements.

The outlook from Nystuen is dreary and desolate, but the station is often full in summer. Snow hills were around us, and on the plain a small lake—the Utza Vand—celebrated for its trout, but cold, and dismal-looking. The ice, they told us, had only lately disappeared from the surface. Here we stayed only long enough to give our horses a rest: for the post-boy, who seemed to have taken a fancy to us, begged to accompany us further on our way. A little beyond this we came to the source of the Laera, and from this point it accompanied us to the end of our journey, swelling at times into a rushing mighty torrent, falling in huge cataracts, with a noise like the “sound of many waters,” and again subsiding into a more tranquil mood, but always moving along with great speed.

From Nystuen we followed the level of the plateau for some time, and then a sharp, picturesque descent landed us at Maristuen. From here grand excursions can be made to the top of some of the mountains, by those who are interested in feats of this description: and from the height of one of them it has been said a hundred glaciers may be seen. Our next stage took us to Hæg, and 1,500 feet nearer the level of the sea. The descent wound about the mountains, which opened up in passes leading to other districts, through picturesque glens covered with wild flowers and lovely ferns: and near at hand, the whole time, the rushing, noisy torrent of the Laera. Vegetation grew more luxuriant and more beautiful. At Hæg we entered the Valley of the Laera, one of the most glorious in Norway. Between this station and Husum we came to the ancient church of Borgund, a fantastic edifice dating from the twelfth century, surmounted by dragons' heads, the timber black with age. Beyond stood an old belfry containing three bells, that are never rung for fear the whole concern should come down: and a lych gate was at each end of the churchyard. Tar as well as age has blackened the church, which was bought some time ago by the Antiquarian Society of Christiania. The interior and exterior of the church are most curious and interesting. A passage, like a small cloister, runs round the outside; the portal is elaborately ornamented with entwined snakes, and the key that opens the great door, with its Runic inscription, is as old and curious as the church itself.

Not less quaint is the interior, with its great wooden pillars, and curious old wood carving. Unhappily, a new church has been erected near to the old one. It is out of harmony with the old building, takes from its dignity and solitary state, and has destroyed some of



NEAR HUSUM.

the romance of one of the grandest, wildest, and loveliest spots in Norway.

Mountains in great masses fell away, opening up huge clefts and passes. Below the church, in a narrow defile between high rocks, rushed the river Laera, foaming, roaring, seething, with wild force,

defying all obstacles in its turbulent path. The old road led over the steep hills to the right, and this we had to follow, for there had been a landslip on the new road, and for the present it was impassable. The ravine leading beside the new road is sublime, wild, and grand to the last extremity, but it was not then that we saw it.

Passing the church, we ascended the steep hill, wound round, and once more descending into the valley, found ourselves at Husum. We had not changed horses or carriages since leaving Skogstad, six hours ago, and thus had lost very little time on the road: and the horses seemed as fresh at the end as at the beginning of the journey. Our post-boy was a little, strong, well-made mountaineer, about



HUSUM.

twenty years of age, full of fire, and energy, and muscular development, who scrambled up the mountain sides like a cat after the wild flowers, laughed and talked incessantly, displayed his small stock of English, and made himself understood somehow. He was a fair, Saxon-looking man, and, dressed in his short blue jacket, knee-breeches, and brigand hat, seemed to harmonize well with the scenery. Towards the end he took up the guide-book, and with a familiarity in which there was nothing displeasing—so unconscious was it, so simple and frank was the fellow, so fresh, open, and genuine his ruddy face and clear, wide-open blue eyes—he pitched upon the vocabulary and phrases at the end, and reading the Norwegian in a clear, fluent voice, with great perseverance caught up the accent of the English equivalents, which he learnt off by heart as they were repeated to him. But at Husum he declared that he must go no further; so we settled our money matters, and, according to the

universal system in Norway, he gave us a hand-grasp that would have done honour to Hercules himself. I can yet feel the honest fellow's expression of good-fellowship. We made him happy with what, to him, was a good dinner, over and above his "drikke penge," and as we had now to wait, whether we would or no, ordered some refreshment for ourselves.

Husum is almost more grandly situated than any other station between Sörum and Laerdal. The defile is somewhat narrow, and the stream rushes through the valley with tremendous speed, thundering over its rocky bed, foaming over great boulders, and seeming to reduce all obstacles in the course of time. Immediately in front of the station it has a fall of many feet: an immense volume of water, white, frothy, seething foam, tumbling into a perfect whirlpool of rage and fury; boiling, rushing, hurling itself over at express speed and with terrible strength; casting around showers of spray, and ascending in white steamy mist. The noise was so tremendous, that when close upon it we could not hear ourselves speak. But to go to the very edge, to sit down upon the rocks, and look over and into this mass of rushing waters, to watch the power of this inexhaustible torrent, was to lay oneself under the influence of a sublime emotion. The rocks here contracted into a very narrow opening, so that the strength and speed of the rushing torrent found itself concentrated into tenfold power.

It was indeed a glorious spot. Surrounding us on all sides were the mountains: bare rocks to the very summit, cut and jagged, lined and wrinkled, as if with the burden of all the ages. Others clothed with furze and pine trees, with sprinklings of ferns and wild flowers: mountains opposing each other, and trees whispering their secrets, as in centuries past, when the waters were rushing onwards to the sea just as they were to-day: and as they will be when we in turn shall have given place to a generation of men and women who will know greater secrets than we do, and make grander discoveries.

At length we started on our way to Blaaflaten (pronounced Bløfaten: the double *aa* in Norwegian is pronounced like *o*). The grandeur of the pass was undiminished, the road being often cut out of the rock and overhanging the rushing torrent, with nothing but the pine fences to protect the traveller. Then all this rugged and sublime scene passed away in a rapid descent that landed us in a broad valley, luxuriant and fertile in aspect, compared with that which had gone before.

After Blaaflaten we entered upon our last stage. I was not sorry to see the end of our journey at hand. Twelve or fourteen hours a day had proved almost too much of a good thing; and yet I think we were less tired now than at the end of our first day's work. The novel mode of travelling; the ever-beautiful scenery; the fresh, sparkling air: the restful if somewhat monotonous solitude—all tended to keep up excitement and interest; whilst a well-earned,

sound rest each night went far to restore the flagging energies of the previous day.

Soon after leaving Blaaflaten we came by the mountain side upon the first wild-rose bush I had seen for many a long day: a sight to bring a rush of home memories to the mind, and conjure up, as if by magic, scenes long gone by. Memories of early days and hours that are the happiest in life if we only knew it, and come not twice to any man: memories veiled by the sober realities of after life, until a flower, a scent, a song, a chime, it may be a page in an old book, or a letter, yellow with age, traced by a well-loved hand, suddenly draws aside the curtain with unsparing haste, and brings back the past with an emotion that is at once the keenest pleasure and pain. The remembrance of days when sorrow and regrets are unknown: when life is not disillusioned, and robbed of that charm—an unknown future. When its aspirations and rose-coloured dreams, that fade so soon never to return, are still things of sense and touch: when the lesson has yet to be learnt that man's heritage is care, and his best happiness must lie in earnest work.

It took but a moment to stop the carriage and gather some of the blossoms, that were full of the homely scent of the dog-roses in our own country lanes. At once an invisible link stretched across the great space dividing the two nations, and brought them for the moment into tender harmony with each other.

But we have not time to moralise now, as we had not then to linger. The mountains fell away, the valley widened, the stream expanded; and about ten o'clock at night we reached Laerdalsoren, and with it the end of our journey.

Yet our rest would only be for the night. Early the next morning we were to take a boat with three strong rowers, and cross a portion of the Sogne Fjord to Aurdal, on our road to the Vettisfos. An excursion of too much interest and importance to be introduced at the end of a paper.



BETWEEN TWO STOOLS.

BY CHARLES HERVEY.

THE Honourable Adolphus Sharpset was in what is popularly called a "fix," and he knew it. His financial position might almost have been compared to that of Mr. Richard Swiveller, when he entered in his little book the names of the streets he disliked, for particular reasons, going down while the shops were open. It was, in fact, as he himself described it in his own flowery language, "a prospective case of whitewash."

Things had been going unkindly with him for some time, but the climax was evidently approaching. His slender allowance as a younger son of Lord Scantiland, himself a needy and embarrassed peer, was forestalled with infinitely more regularity than it was paid; his "paper" was hopelessly unnegotiable, and the list of his debts rivalled in length at least the famous catalogue of Leporello. As, however, he fully recognised the principle laid down by the lamented Brummell respecting the folly of "muddling away one's fortune in paying tradesmen's bills," this latter responsibility troubled him very little. Provided that he could contrive to keep afloat at the Caravansary—a sort of nondescript club, familiarly designated by its members the "Refuge"—and indulge in occasionally backing his fancy for the Cambridgeshire or City and Suburban, his conscience was tolerably easy.

As yet he had managed, by dint of an insinuating address and, when it suited his purpose, an assumption of extreme affability, to weaken the storm, but people were becoming more and more sceptical touching the marketable value of his promises. His landlady in Bury Street had already let fall sundry broad hints that a settlement for the current half year would be highly convenient to her; and even his tailor, formerly the most obsequious and accommodating of Schneiders, had peremptorily declined any further dealings with so unprofitable a customer.

"So you see, old fellow," remarked the Honourable Adolphus in the smoking-room of the Caravansary, to his equally impecunious friend, Frank Lascelles, after a brief exposé of the melancholy state of affairs, "things are about as fishy as they can be; and if Brother to Merrylegs doesn't pull off the handicap, there's no help for it—I must go in for the widow."

"You might do worse," replied Frank. "Three thousand a-year at her own disposal, besides the house in Wimpole Street and the best cook for curry in all London! Might be a trifle younger, certainly, but one can't have everything. And mark my words, Dolly, if you don't make strong running, the Major will."

"Confound the Major!"

"With all my heart, but keep an eye on him. The cad wasn't born yesterday, and is as hard up as either of us. He has been unlucky at whist lately, and dropped a good bit of money on the Leger; so depend upon it, if he has a chance of recouping himself by marrying the widow, he won't let it slip."

"He might have her to-morrow, and welcome," said the Honourable Adolphus, "if I could only be sure of landing the sixty-six fifties; not an impossible contingency by any means, if the horse is half the flyer they seem to think in the stable. He's going up in the market like a rocket, and if I chose to hedge ——"

"Why don't you?"

"Simply because a few hundreds won't put me straight, and a few thousands will; so I've no choice in the matter, and must stand the shot. However, it's as well to have two strings to one's bow, so I'll take your advice about the Mangoe, if only for the pleasure of giving our friend the Major the go-by. By the way, we shall meet him at dinner there to-day, and you'll have an opportunity of carrying on with that stunning girl, Alice Carruthers. Pity, for your sake, that she and the old lady can't change places: a waiting game is hard lines in the long run."

"Especially when there is nothing to wait for," assented Lascelles in a despondent tone. "A poor devil of a barrister, without a brief or the hope of one, and a portionless orphan with a pretty face, pour tout potage; the prospect isn't over lively."

"Something may turn up yet," encouragingly observed his companion. "That fellow Micawber found it all right in the end, you know."

"And all wrong in the beginning," retorted Frank. "I fancy the resemblance between us is likely to stop there."

Wimpole Street is not precisely a locality calculated to impress the passing stranger with any exaggerated idea of the cheerfulness of its population. It is eminently respectable and dingily uniform; and, due allowance made for the difference of architecture, instinctively suggests a vague reminiscence of the street of tombs at Pompeii. Like other parallel thoroughfares in its immediate vicinity, it presents on either side an unbroken vista of orthodox family dwellings, the sole indication relative to the social status of their occupants being an occasional highly polished brass plate attached to the door, and decorated with the name of some medical or surgical practitioner; or, at still rarer intervals, a manuscript advertisement of "Apartments to Let."

The house inhabited by Mrs. Mangoe, viewed externally, differed in no essential respect from those of her neighbours, and had evidently been constructed after the same pattern; but the interior, furnished with every attention to comfort and luxurious elegance, was peculiarly

characteristic of its owner. Indian mattings of the finest texture, the softest Turkey carpets, and the most delicately woven Persian hangings gave a semi-oriental air to the lofty but somewhat narrowly proportioned rooms, while the stiff-backed chairs and slippery chintz-covered sofas, still religiously adhered to by certain indigenous notabilities of the quarter, had been advantageously replaced by the latest and most artistic inventions of Parisian upholstery. One of the rooms had been fitted up as a boudoir, and here the widow sat, awaiting the arrival of her guests, and watching the movements of a young and graceful girl engaged in selecting a bouquet of flowers and ferns from an adjoining miniature conservatory.

The relict of the deceased Mangoe—in his day one of the ablest and shrewdest judicial functionaries of Calcutta—was a short, stout and middle-aged dame, with small keen eyes and a cheery, good-humoured face; her grey silk dress was richly trimmed with black lace, and a liberal moiety of her plump little arms was literally covered with bracelets and bangles. Her companion, on the contrary, was indebted for her attractive appearance neither to milliner nor jeweller; she was simply but becomingly attired in white muslin, without any other ornament than a single *gloire de Dijon* artistically entwined among the folds of her luxuriant chestnut hair.

Alice Carruthers, however, needed no extraneous adjunct to the charm of her nineteen years and exquisitely feminine beauty. She was tall and slightly formed, with soft blue eyes and a complexion as delicate as a *thé rose*, and it would be difficult to imagine a prettier picture than her slender and elegant figure bending over the freshly gathered store of bud and blossom—"herself a fairer flower." Presently, her task accomplished, she re-entered the boudoir, and tastefully grouped her fragrant spoils in a china vase, glancing every now and then at the widow, as if to solicit her approval.

"When you have finished, child," said Mrs. Mangoe, "sit down by me. I have something to say before the people come. There, that low chair will do. Now, tell me truly, is there anything between you and Frank Lascelles?"

At this point-blank question Miss Carruthers blushed, and, after a momentary pause of embarrassment, stammered out: "I think he likes me, but —"

"Is afraid to say so, because he is too poor to marry," interrupted the widow. "Am I not right?"

Alice nodded affirmatively.

"I thought so, and I needn't ask your ideas on the subject, for your cheeks have told the tale already. Well, when I have had a talk with the young man about ways and means, we shall see; he is not a fortune-hunter, at any rate, and that's more than can be said of certain gentlemen of our acquaintance. No, no, my Alice shall be chosen for her own pretty self or not at all, and must play her part of dependent on an old woman's bounty a little longer. But hush!

I hear footsteps on the stairs. Take your embroidery, child, and sit where you usually do."

Miss Carruthers had scarcely time to rise from her chair, and retire to a more respectful distance from her protectress, before an irreproachably white-cravated butler, appearing at the door, announced in a sonorous tone,

"Major de Mogyns!"

The new-comer, a middle-sized individual, with stiff black hair, suspiciously bordering on purple, and a carefully waxed moustache, entered the room as jauntily as a decided tendency to obesity would permit, and advanced towards the widow with an air of great empressment, vouchsafing only a distant and somewhat cavalier bow to her fair companion. While he is inquiring in accents of the tenderest solicitude after the health of "dear Mrs. Mangoe," and installing himself in a comfortable arm-chair by her side, it may not be inopportune to enlighten the reader respecting the social position of the gallant warrior, and explain by what means he had contrived to obtain admittance on so apparently intimate a footing to No. 200A, Wimpole Street.

Major de Mogyns, then, or, as he was habitually styled at the Caravansary, "the Major," possibly because no other of its members possessed any claim to a similar distinctive title, had borne during the earlier part of his career the less euphonious but more legitimate name of Muggins, which he subsequently discarded together with all reminiscences of an obscure parentage, and of a family still vegetating in the dingy atmosphere of a small manufacturing town. Whence he derived his military grade, or to what regiment he had belonged, no one precisely knew, his allusions to such topics being of the vaguest; but it was generally supposed, from his evident familiarity with life in India, that he had been at some time or other attached to a native corps. He had become acquainted with the husband of his hostess in Calcutta, and afterwards renewed his intercourse with him at Cheltenham, a favourite resort of the retired civilian. It was there that the latter first met the Honourable Adolphus, during a flying trip of the sporting patrician to Gloucestershire on the occasion of a steeple-chase, where he himself was among the competitors; and it may parenthetically be added, disappointed his backers by an untimely "cropper" at the second fence.

Since the death of Mr. Mangoe, the Major had continued to cultivate the society of his widow, and from the period of her installation in London seldom allowed many days to elapse without finding his way to Wimpole Street, and neglected no opportunity of assuming the rights and privileges of "*l'ami de la maison*." Sharpset's visits, on the contrary, were few and far between; but when he did appear, his respectful devotion to the lady of the house was gall and wormwood to his military rival, who hated him cordially, and sought by every means in his power to disparage

Between Two Stools.

him in the eyes of her whom he already looked upon as the future Mrs. de Mogyns. What the widow's private opinion as to the likelihood of that event may have been we can only conjecture, for she prudently kept it to herself; but it is certain that the Major, with or without reason, chose to consider himself a favoured suitor, and was in the best of spirits accordingly.

He was still complacently occupied in "making running," when a ring at the hall door heralded the approach of the two remaining guests; a few minutes later the party descended to the dining-room, the Honourable Adolphus naturally pairing off with Mrs. Mangoe, and de Mogyns offering his arm with an air of sublime protection to Alice, while Frank Lascelles, inwardly chafing, followed partnerless in the rear. Thanks, however, to the friendly sociability of a round table, he found himself seated beside the object of his affections, and was consequently in the seventh heaven; but although she blushed very much when spoken to, she nevertheless studiously avoided responding otherwise than by monosyllables to his attempts at conversation. Sharpset was in high force, and discoursed incessantly on current and fashionable topics, to the infinite disgust of the Major, who, unable to get in more than a word here and there, and disdaining to waste his eloquence on so unremunerative an auditor as Miss Carruthers, fidgeted sulkily in his chair, and drank more champagne than was good for him. When the ladies had retired, and the claret had made its circuit, he thawed a little, and condescended to ask what were the latest odds on the coming handicap.

"Five to one on the field," replied the Honourable Adolphus. "Fifteen against Brother to Merrylegs."

"Ah!" said de Mogyns drily. "You've backed him, I hear?"

"Rather!"

The Major filled his glass, and looked oracular. "Oh," said he again, "he won't win. Halford's mare can give him six pounds, and beat him in a walk."

"What, Dulcibella! Not if he knows it," retorted Sharpset. "She was a length and a half behind him in the Chester Cup."

A long discussion ensued respecting the comparative merits and performances of the animal in question, during which Frank, who had metal more attractive upstairs, slipped quietly out of the room, leaving the two worthies tête-à-tête. When they at length made their appearance, both the widow and Lascelles seemed preoccupied, and indisposed to talk; while Alice, bending over her embroidery frame, played propriety in a corner. Contrary, therefore, to the usual habits of the house, the party broke up early, and the trio strolled together as far as the Caravansary, where the Major, who was longing for his rubber, at once adjourned to the card room.

"What on earth has come to you to-night, Frank?" inquired the Honourable Adolphus, when he and his friend were alone. "You

gave us the slip at dessert, and have hardly spoken a word since. If that is the result of passing an evening with one's lady-love, courtship must be an uncommonly uphill game. Isn't Miss Barkis willing?"

"I wasn't thinking about her," replied Lascelles, "but about what happened before you came upstairs. I had to undergo a regular cross-examination concerning the state of my finances and my prospects at the bar, and I will say that for our amiable hostess, Ballantine couldn't have done it better. She turned me inside out like a glove."

"Put you through your paces, eh?" said Sharpset.

"Exactly, and the worst of it was, I fancied that Alice enjoyed my embarrassment, though she tried hard to prevent my seeing it. Altogether, I felt extremely uncomfortable."

"Like our friend the Major at dinner," remarked his companion, chuckling at the recollection. "I think I managed to put a spoke in his wheel to-night. He won't find it a walk over, I'll answer for that."

"Then you really intend going in for the widow?"

"Most decidedly. It's a safer spec than Brother to Merrylegs."

"I don't know about that," said the barrister doubtfully. "From what I have seen of her this evening, if I had the choice, I would rather depend on the horse!"

The Honourable Adolphus was not a man to let the grass grow under his feet; whatever he made up his mind to do, he did quickly and thoroughly, or, according to his own particular phraseology, "came with a rush." This natural impulse to take time by the forelock was strengthened in the present instance by two additional incentives to exertion, namely, the desire to cut out *de Mogyns*, and, what was still more important under the circumstances, the deplorable condition of his finances. It now only wanted a week to the race, and if by that period he had not succeeded in one or the other of his projects, he was, as he himself expressed it, a "gone coon."

Determined, therefore, to prosecute the siege with vigour, he rarely let an afternoon go by without a pilgrimage to Wimpole Street, but at whatever hour he happened to arrive, he invariably found the Major there before him; and though on every occasion he prolonged his visit to an unconscionable length, never by any chance was he even for a moment alone with the widow. The conversation being thus limited to generalities, neither party had an opportunity of ascertaining who held the first place in the lady's good graces; and as she carefully abstained from showing the slightest preference for either, and accepted their complimentary tributes to her looks and dress as a mere matter of course, they can hardly be said to have gained much by their chivalrous devotion.

This unpromising state of things continued until the day preceding that on which the handicap was to be decided, when Frank, who had

employed the interval since his last meeting with Alice in heroic but ineffectual efforts to impress the attorneys of his acquaintance with a favourable idea of his forensic abilities, received the following note :

“Wimpole Street, Monday.

“DEAR MR. LASCELLES,—Could you possibly oblige me with a call early to-morrow morning? I wish to consult you on a little matter of business.—Sincerely yours,

“EMILY MANGOE.”

“What can this mean?” he thought. “Why should she apply to me of all people in the world—unless, indeed,” as an idea struck him, “she wants to pump me about Dolly! I had better look him up at any rate, and ascertain how the land lies before I go; for if she *does* intend to marry him—which I don’t believe—I shall be in the witness-box again for a certainty!”

Late on the same afternoon he found his friend, as he had anticipated, in the smoking-room of the club, highly elated at the steady advance in the betting of Brother to Merrylegs, who, his backer exultingly declared, was now nearly as good a favourite as anything in the race. When Lascelles informed him of his summons to Wimpole Street, Sharpset emphatically affirmed that nothing could be more satisfactorily conclusive. “Don’t you see her drift?” he argued; “she can’t say ‘yes’ before she’s asked, so she lets me know in a roundabout way that the sooner I *do* ask her the better. I’ll look in there to-morrow before the telegrams come, and strike while the iron’s hot. I tell you candidly, old fellow, I shouldn’t be in the least surprised if I landed the double event.”

“I should,” thought Frank, as the friends separated.

Soon after eleven on the following morning the young lawyer was ushered into the widow’s boudoir; she was alone, and received him with her usual cordiality, but with a gravity of manner by no means habitual to her. “I was anxious to see you, Mr. Lascelles,” she began, “for I have to ask your opinion on a subject which, if I do not mistake, interests us both. Sit down here,” she added, pointing to a chair beside her, “and let me tell my story my own way, as clearly and as briefly as I can.”

Frank bowed and obeyed her, wondering what was coming next.

“Since my arrival in England from India,” she continued, “an old friend, to whom my husband from motives of gratitude was sincerely attached, died in Calcutta, partly from grief at the loss of his wife, partly from a sudden reverse of fortune, which had reduced him from a state of affluence to absolute poverty. He left one daughter, who had been for some years, on account of delicate health, under the charge of an aunt in Devonshire, the widow of an officer, and in receipt of a small annual pension. She also died a

few months ago, and I immediately sent for the young girl—you will already have guessed that I am speaking of Alice Carruthers—and installed her here as my companion. You are wondering, no doubt, why I am telling you this, but I have as good eyes as most people, and have noticed the direction of *yours* pretty accurately whenever you have been here. I am perfectly aware that the circumstances you alluded to the other evening have alone prevented you from asking my protégée to be your wife, and as I have an idea that she is not altogether disinclined to listen favourably to such a proposal on your part, I intend helping you as far as I can. My adopted daughter—you have never heard of her, but you will see her here some day—will of course inherit the bulk of my property, but when Alice marries, three hundred a-year will be settled on her; it is not much to begin housekeeping upon, but your own exertions must supply the rest. What do you say?"

"What can I say," cried Frank, radiant with delight, "but that you are the best and kindest of women, and I the happiest of men!"

"Not quite so fast," interrupted Mrs. Mangoe, with a smile, "there is another person to be consulted, and I will send her to you that you may plead your cause yourself. I expect Major de Mogyns this morning," she added, with a merry twinkle of her eye, and as I have not hitherto mentioned the existence of my adopted daughter either to him or your friend Mr. Sharpset, I think it as well for several reasons that I should do so to-day. Perhaps you understand why!" and without waiting for an answer, she left the boudoir. Shortly after, Alice made her wished-for appearance, and exactly at the same moment the Major, gorgeously attired, and with an air of supreme self-confidence, entered the drawing-room, where the widow was ready to receive him.

Of the interview between the lovers we need merely say that it was very long and perfectly satisfactory, and only abridged by a summons to the luncheon table. They found Mrs. Mangoe endeavouring to check an uncontrollable inclination to laugh.

"I really ought to be ashamed of myself," she said, "but I can't help it, the man's face was too ridiculous. He had a new coat on, with a flower in his button-hole, and his whiskers were fresh dyed for the occasion: quite the bridegroom as he evidently thought, and was so terribly impatient to come to the point, I suppose for fear of interruption, that he stammered out his phrases like a school-boy. However, their meaning was clear enough, so I cut him short without any ceremony by a flat refusal. At first, he seemed as if he couldn't believe his ears, and looked so utterly woe-begone that I had pity on him, told him plainly that it would be his own fault if we did not remain good friends, and asked him to dinner next week. Just as he was going away, Warner brought him a telegram which had been sent on from his club; he asked my permission to open it, turned very pale, and muttering something I could not understand about

scratching a mare, took leave of me abruptly, and hurried away. What did he mean, Mr. Lascelles?"

"That he has the same ill luck at Newmarket as in Wimpole Street, I fancy," replied Frank. "He expected to win a large stake to-day by backing a mare called Dulcibella, and from what you say she must have been struck out of the race. I have no particular liking for the Major, but I have been so fortunate myself that I am almost sorry for him."

"More fortunate perhaps than you imagine," said the widow. "Don't you think, Alice, we may tell him all?"

"I think we may," replied Miss Carruthers, glancing slyly at her betrothed.

"Well then, Frank—I shall call you so in future, mind—I must say that whatever your faults may be, and I'll warrant you have plenty, curiosity is not one of them."

"How so, my dear madam?" inquired the barrister.

"My good sir, if you had been a woman, and had heard me speak of an adopted daughter, of whose existence you had not the remotest idea, you would never have rested until you had found out who she was, and all about her."

"Ah, yes, I remember," said Lascelles, "but I am afraid that I hardly listened to what you were saying. I was thinking——"

"Of somebody else! Very natural perhaps, but not over polite. However, when you see her, you will own that she is a charming girl."

"No doubt," said Frank, feeling that he was expected to say something.

"A sweet pretty creature," continued the widow, "with the softest blue eyes and the loveliest fair hair imaginable, and a complexion like alabaster."

"But, my dear Mrs. Mangoe," laughingly observed the young man, "if you were talking of Alice, you could not have described her more exactly."

"And of whom but Alice do you suppose I am talking?" retorted the lady. "Is she not my adopted daughter, and have you only just found it out, you silly fellow?"

Before Frank could answer, the door opened, and the butler, his face redder than usual, for he had been disturbed at his dinner, announced that Mr. Sharpset was in the drawing-room.

"Bless me!" exclaimed the widow, rising hastily from her chair, "I had quite forgotten he was coming. Alice must tell you the rest. If it's the old story over again," she said to herself as she went up stairs, "I shall have easier work with him than with the Major!"

She was apparently right in her previsions, for in less than a quarter of an hour the Honourable Adolphus, closing the street door with a tremendous bang, jumped into a Hansom which was in waiting, and bade the driver "bowl away like bricks" to the Caravansary.

"Floored!" he muttered as he lit a cigar, "regularly up a tree! Frank was right in recommending me to trust to the horse. It's my only chance now. Might as well have been on the course after all—wish I had! Half-past three, by Jove!" he added, consulting his watch, "the news must have arrived by this time. Push along, cabby!"

"Cabby" was equal to the occasion, and a few minutes later landed his fare at the club door. There stood the Major, smoking his cheroot, his eyes twinkling maliciously as he recognised the new comer.

"Who's won?" shouted the Honourable Adolphus, darting out of the vehicle.

"Lightfoot by a neck," curtly replied de Mogyns, looking his questioner full in the face to see how he took it; "Achilles second, Dorchester third."

Sharpset stared at him for a moment, as if unable to realise what he heard. "And Brother to Merrylegs," he gasped, "where was he?"

"Brother to Merrylegs," slowly repeated the Major, inwardly enjoying his rival's mortification. "Nowhere."

"Not scratched?"

"Pretty nearly the same thing as far as his *backers* (with a satirical emphasis on the word) are concerned," responded his tormentor.

"Brother to Merrylegs was *left at the post*!"



A RARE CASE.

THERE was a sea fog that day. It surrounded on all sides the lonely-looking house on the cliff's edge. The house was not really lonely; but a turn in the road hid it from the coastguard station, a short mile beyond which lay a busy, populous, sea-side town. From the back of the building the downs swept upwards in gentle undulations; here and there, where the hill-side fields had been turned up by the plough, the clay showed reddish brown when the fog lifted; everywhere else a tender green hue was spread, from the thin ears of spring wheat, or the grass on the pasture land. The spot was so little lonely in reality that noises from the town mingled with the murmur of the waves upon the beach below.

You might have fancied it a place from whence no cry for help could be heard; a place for a misanthrope to live alone in; a fitting spot to be the scene of a wayside robbery. Desolate it certainly was, without any fancy in the matter. Nothing like a tree sheltered it; there were only the fields, the sky, and the waste of waters beyond the cliff's edge. The plaster had fallen from the walls, and left brown patches on them here and there. The garden was overgrown with weeds, and one or two outbuildings at the rear had been suffered to fall altogether into disrepair. The fact was the house was no longer used as the dwelling-house to the farm upon which it stood, but was to let, if anyone could be found to take it. Meantime it was in the charge of the young woman, scarcely past girlhood, who was leaning against the top bar of the gate and looking out into the fog.

She might have been watching for the tenant that never came, for at every sound upon the road she listened intently, and turned her head to follow with her eyes the different vehicles that from time to time came out of the fog on her right hand to vanish into the fog on her left, like phantom visitors from a world beyond.

Perhaps this idea of phantom visitors had suggested itself to the girl, for her eyes looked frightened, and her restless glance betrayed a mind ill at ease. Her lips moved too, as though from living much alone she had contracted a habit of talking to herself. Indifferent passers-by, chancing to notice the figure at the gate, saw only just the sort of person one would expect to see in such a place. Others who looked more attentively might have seen an unhappy, terrified girl, not yet accustomed to the place she filled just now; one for whom it might have been better to have a friend at hand; one for whom it might not be well to live alone.

"She be there again," remarked one of two men, walking at the head of a team of horses drawing a waggon-load of coals.

"She be always there," replied his companion. "I've come along days, and I've come along nights; I've passed by Stonedene in fair weather, and in storms as threatened to send the waggon over the cliff; and days or nights, fair weather or foul, I've seen her on the watch."

"On the look-out for a tenant for Master Drew," said the first speaker, cracking the long cart-whip in his hand.

"Aye; so it would appear."

"Yet the house doesn't let," remarked the other, looking back over his shoulder as they passed the gate.

"Nor it won't let! Why, who'd take it? Who in their senses leastwise?"

"Along of it being that much out of repair, you mean?"

"I don't mean no such thing. What's a day's work or so about a place like that? It won't let because it's an unlucky house. Drew is an unlucky man, and always was. There's a spell upon the house. Who but Drew would have put a mad woman in for to take charge of it? There's a spell upon it, I say."

Both men looked back, but the house was no longer visible; the fog hid it.

The next person to pass along the road was Drew himself; and it must be allowed that if Drew was really an unlucky man, he failed to look the part. There was about him a certain cheerfulness of aspect that might have defied the worst ill-luck could do him. It was in the cheerfulest of voices too, that, half checking the horse in the shafts of the light cart he drove, he called out a greeting to his care-taker as he went by: or would have gone by, had not an imploring gesture of her hand induced him to pull up altogether.

The gate at which she stood opened upon a farm track leading to the crest of the Downs. The door of the house was at the side of the track, and just within the gate which the young woman now threw open.

"Must I turn in, ma'am?" said the farmer, in his hearty voice. "Well, if there's no help for it, I suppose I must, though time presses with me this afternoon."

"Do I trouble you so often that you grudge me a few minutes? When I asked you to leave me here I promised to give no trouble; I have kept my word," she said.

"You have—to be sure you have; the more reason I should turn in now, or at any time when you make a point of it. Maybe, it is in my interest you make a point of it to-day; you think I should see to the place a bit; there's more plaster fallen. No chance of a tenant with a house in this state."

"It is an unlucky house; or so they say," she replied, glancing carelessly round upon the fallen plaster lying where it fell, and the tangled weeds in the garden.

"I don't hold with ill-luck. Law bless you, ma'am! I've seen

too much of life for that. A man makes his own luck—and a woman too."

The girl shook her head impatiently.

"I tell you they call it an unlucky house. What has it been to me? and you—did you do so well here that you can afford to laugh at the notion?"

"Times were hard," he said; "luck had naught to do with it; and times have mended with me since. But if you don't like the house, why not leave it?"

"I must earn my living," she returned, quickly. "He would be better pleased I should do that alone as I am here, than in the old way. I am sure of it, Mr. Drew."

"If the house lets ——" began the farmer, but she cut short his speech.

"If it lets I will come back to you; but till it does some one must be here, and why not I as well as another? There was a gentleman came to look over it only the other day."

"You told him what a lonesome seeming place it was, for all it stands so near the town," said the farmer, with a somewhat rueful look upon his round and cheery countenance.

"I did," she replied, eagerly; "and how the wind sweeps across the Downs; or when it blows from the sea on stormy days is so strong and fierce you can scarce keep your feet outside the door."

"And how warm it is in summer," Drew suggested.

"Certainly; I told him that as well—how there is no speck of shade anywhere within sight, except the shadow thrown by the house itself—an unlucky house, Mr. Drew."

"Aye; I've no doubt you told him all about it, and that he went away fully satisfied, and with no notion of coming to me or of wanting any further information," said Drew, drily. "That's about all the ill-luck there is, I take it—that I get no tenant."

He knew very well that he should get none as long as this woman was here; this woman who, amongst all the misfortunes she had known, would count it the greatest that could still befall her should she have to leave Stonedene.

"You have heard nothing?" she asked, after a moment or two of silence, during which her eyes had turned again to watch the road before the gate. "You would be sure and tell me if you had. It was to you he said—what did he say? Tell me the words again." She drew a step or two nearer, and laid her hand upon the side of the cart as she spoke.

"It was on the Downs ——" he began, but she interrupted him again, and took up the tale herself.

"Yes, with the sheep feeding all round. You two were alone—he had sent me back. The bells were ringing in the churches of the town—I hear them now: it was on the Downs, and he said ——"

"We walked a bit together," Drew went on, as though by

lengthening the narrative he sought to calm her, and yet knew it would all end as it had ended many times before. "It was a summer afternoon and everything was very still and peaceful, and when it came to good-bye between us, he just wrung my hand, and said, 'Take care of my wife, Drew, till I come back.'"

"Till he comes back! Oh, listen to the waves upon the shore!" she cried. "Till he comes back!" and with that fell to bitter weeping.

Her distress, which he had seen growing, and which he knew of old would overcome her at the repetition of the words he would have spared her if he could, but which she forced from his lips each time they spoke together, had an odd effect upon Drew. The respectful tone in which he had hitherto addressed her changed at once to one more familiar; he leant down from the cart and patted her upon the shoulder.

"Mattie! why, Mattie! this will never do. I've told you before that it looks as though you did not trust him after all."

"I do trust him," she sobbed.

"Of course you do; who should if we did not, you and I, who know him for a good man?"

"That's what I say!" she exclaimed; "but I like to hear you say it too. I called you in to-day to hear it, Mr. Drew."

"Come over to the farm and hear it there," he replied. But she stepped back from the cart hurriedly, crying that others did not think as he thought, that he knew as well as she did what others said, and what tale she would hear from them if she went to the farm.

Drew, ruefully conscious that "others" meant in this case his sister Eliza, looked somewhat crestfallen for a moment, then cheered up again, and bid the young girl take heart and remember that she had one friend to stand by her still.

"You do me good always," she said at last, with an effort recovering the manner in which she had first addressed him: thereby seeming, as it were, to motion him back again to the greater distance that had appeared to separate them then. "Living alone, I grow faint-hearted at times—never doubting him, you understand; never for one instant doubting him; only fearing he may be dead. What else could keep him from me? And if it is death, why that is the will of God, and I shall be reconciled to it in time—only, it is weary waiting."

"Wait and trust a while longer, ma'am," said the farmer; "we shall know the rights of it all some day. I've said so again and again, and I repeat it now. This fog hides the sky, maybe, but the sky's there all the same. Don't you get down-hearted, but wait and trust awhile longer."

He gathered up the reins as he spoke, and with one more cheerful "good-bye" disappeared along the track leading straight upwards to the crest of the Downs, in which direction his land lay, and the

house he now occupied. Having been delayed so long, he changed his mind about proceeding to the town and went towards home at once.

"What will be the end of it? I can see no further ahead in my mind than I can see through this fog to-day," he muttered to himself, as the wheels jolted along the uneven road, and the mist crept round him. "It has been a queer business, and just my luck that it should happen to Mattie of all people in the world."

Mattie's story was simple enough. Anyone would have told you it has been repeated often and often in the world's history: a common tale, and not surprising in the least. If Drew was surprised at the wrong in it, that was only because wrong was apt to surprise him. He found it easier to believe in right, and to credit men with good intentions.

The orphan child of a former servant in a wealthy family, Mattie had shared the lessons and the play of the young daughter of the house, until a time came when it was convenient to turn the humble companion adrift to work for herself. It may have been a piece of the ill-luck his neighbours ascribed to Drew, that it should have been to his farm the girl came as help to his sister, or it may have been a piece of his constitutional good-nature that made him agree to take under his roof this pretty lass, untrained for service and educated far above her station. He heard of her quite accidentally through the steward of the people who had hitherto befriended her. As for them, they were relieved to hear of a good home for her, and one far away from the park-like, heathy land, with its pines and chestnuts, in which pleasant place Mattie's lines had hitherto fallen.

Mattie had been given an education that might have satisfied a School Board inspector of to-day, and had moreover caught up little refinements of speech and manner that made her quite a superior young woman. She might have gone out as a nursery governess, but expressed herself more satisfied with a country life in a farm-house where there was a young child to look after, and light work required of her. The awakening was rude when her patrons said carelessly that the time was come for her to do something for herself, and that a suitable situation should be found for her. Mattie had a spirit of her own; she did not wait to see what would be done for her, but sought the steward, always a good friend of hers, and through him found a situation for herself: glad that it took her into quite another part of Sussex, and far from all old associations.

Drew's widowed sister, Mrs. Bankes, who lived with him, and whose child it was Mattie had come to nurse, amongst other duties too numerous to mention, for there was but one servant kept—Drew's sister exclaimed in despair when the farmer brought home the young, lady-like, delicate-looking girl:

"We want a strong, hard-working lass! This one does not know her right hand from her left. She is as good as a lady—or as bad,

and has never milked a cow in her life ! What were you thinking of to bring her here ? ”

“ She came in my way. I suppose you can teach her. She has not a friend in the world to look to. ”

“ She will not be worth her wages. ”

“ Ah ! that’s just my luck : well, we must do the best we can with her. If the steward had never mentioned her to me, now—but then he did mention her, and here she is. ”

There she was, and there she stayed. Apt to learn, willing to be taught, grateful for the real kindness she met with, Mattie was soon the best hand at milking for miles round, soon devoted to the baby. Three years passed quietly, and then came the romance of Mattie’s life.

She was twenty that summer, and Adam Armitage, a grave man, was fully ten years her senior. A great traveller, member of a world-renowned scientific society, a student and discoverer—he was, between two scientific expeditions, refreshing heart and brain by a walking tour through the home counties. He had wandered over the level marsh lands, losing his way among the watercourses ; sauntered through lanes whose hedges were one tangle of wild flowers ; past villages embosomed in trees, old manors with spreading oaks and leafy beeches, and deer standing knee-deep in ferns. Then away over the Downs, walking for miles along the breezy crest of them, a wide panorama on either hand, and beneath the foot a grassy track, hardly visible at times, but reappearing again : and if faithfully followed leading straight to the sea-side town near to which was Drew’s farm, and Mattie milking her cows, playing with the child amongst the hay, singing at her work, and all unconscious of coming fate.

Adam’s walking tour ended at the farm Drew had taken only a year before, and the dwelling-house it had been found more convenient to inhabit than the smaller building on the old land close to the road. Mr. Armitage found the pure air of the Downs good for him. He hired a little upper chamber, from the window of which one could inhale the strong sea breeze that yet came to it, subtly scented from the blossoming clover across which it blew. He made friends with all the family. To Mattie it was delightful to meet once more some one with all the tricks of speech and manner of the more refined society amongst which her youth had been passed. Little Harry followed this new friend wherever he went ; Harry’s mother called him a right-down pleasant gentleman ; the farmer called him a good man.

Drew took this idea from the long talks the men had together, and to which Mattie would listen, humbly feeling that, in spite of her own superior education, the farmer had more in common with Mr. Armitage, and understood him better than she could. Living in a practical work-a-day world himself, the world of science had a wonderful fascination for Drew. He liked few things better than to hear of recent discoveries, and the light thrown by them upon re-

vealed religion. For to the farmer it was light and not darkness. He was not afraid of new ideas ; not afraid of growth even in religion, or that, in growing, it should not adapt itself to the progress of knowledge. Drew found Christianity quite elastic enough for that, and said that the one Truth could be made to embrace all truths. Adam Armitage was a man after the farmer's own heart. He did not know much about his guest ; indeed no one questioned him as to who he was or whence he came ; it was from what he knew of him personally—of his thoughts, and words, and ways, that Drew called him a good man.

They all missed him when he went away, Mattie most of all ; but the following summer saw him there again, a welcome old friend this time, and no stranger.

Drew, a keen observer of all that went on around him, was not so much taken by surprise as his sister was, when one day, towards the end of this second visit, Adam and Mattie were both mysteriously missing. A strong-armed country lass made her appearance before night. She was the bearer of a note from Mattie, confessing that she and Mr. Armitage were married, and hoping the little servant sent might supply her place so that no one would be inconvenienced. Drew might shake his head and look thoughtful, but Mr. Armitage was his own master, and it was not the first time a gentleman had married a country lass. Besides, the deed was done, and past recall. They had gone quietly to one of the churches in the town from whence the sound of bells floated up to the farm, and had been married by special licence. Adam had taken a lodging for his bride, and there they passed one brief, bright week of happiness ; then one morning walked quietly back together, Mattie blushing and smiling, and looking so lovely and ladylike in a simple dress such as she used to wear before she came to the farm, that they hardly knew her.

Adam explained that he meant to leave his wife for two days—no more—in the care of her old friends ; at the end of that time he would return to fetch her. There were arrangements to make with regard to the scientific expedition about to start immediately. It would sail without him now, but it behoved him to do his best that his place should be as well filled as might be. There was also his mother to see, and to prepare for receiving Mattie. In a day or two at farthest he would be back.

Mattie walked a little way with her husband and the farmer, along the breezy uplands, and then Adam sent her back, and hastened his own steps in the direction of the little station at the foot of the Downs. When he came again he said, laughing, that it would be from B—— Station, and that he would drive in a fly through the Stonedene Gate and along the track, the only approach to a carriage road leading to the farm.

"I shall have a box of fine things to bring for my little wife," he cried, casting a loving glance at the lovely face at his side.

Mattie answered that she wanted no fine things, but went away smiling as he meant she should do, and only paused now and then to look after the two men as long as they remained in sight. It was natural that she should feel a little afraid of this unknown lady, Adam's mother, but that fear was the only shadow on Mattie's path. She had given her heart frankly away, and an instinct seemed to assure her that she had given it into safe keeping. It was an idyll, a poem, as true a love story as the world has seen, that had written itself here in this out-of-the-way spot on the lonely Sussex Downs: and for two days longer Mattie was in Paradise—a fool's Paradise, Eliza Bankes said later.

On the third day they might look for Adam to return, but that day passed, and many another, until the days were weeks, and the weeks months, and he neither came nor wrote. Mattie remembered how when she had turned to look back for the last time upon that homeward walk, she had seen his figure distinct against the sky for one instant, and in the next lost it entirely as he passed out of sight over the swelling line of hills. Just so she seemed to have lost him in one instant out of her life. And yet, she never lost faith and trust in him; never ceased to watch for his coming again.

It was not long before Mrs. Bankes, who had once believed in him as much as any of them, began to shrug her shoulders, and remark that it was a poor tale, but a common one enough. Mattie had had her way, and made Mr. Armitage marry her, but he had regretted it as soon as the deed was done; they would never see anything more of him; she might make up her mind to that; only Drew ought to hunt him out and force him to make Mattie an allowance, or do something—Mrs. Bankes did not clearly specify what—to make it up to her, since it was evident that, supposing the marriage was a true one—and how could they tell whether it was or not when the girl had gone off in that sly way by herself, which was not by any means conduct they had a right to expect from her—even if the marriage was a true one and Mattie a wife at all, what was she but a deserted wife for the rest of her days?

Drew after a time, either goaded to the step by his sister's loud-voiced arguments, or prompted to it by his own sense of what was due to Mattie, not only took pains to ascertain that the marriage was real enough, but the further pains of searching for and finding the address of Adam Armitage in London. By that time Mattie had fully made up her mind that her husband *had*, after all, sailed with the expedition, and that his letters to herself had either miscarried or been intercepted. She was ready to make up her mind to anything rather than to admit the faintest suggestion that he was false to her and to himself—to the high standard that she knew, and that the farmer knew, was the one by which Adam measured men and things, and his own life and conduct. It was strange how this girl and her former master both trusted Adam in the face of his

inexplicable silence ; in the face of even a more ominous discovery made by Drew when in town—the discovery that he had never mentioned Mattie's name to his mother, or alluded to Mattie at all. As for Adam, Mrs. Armitage had declared he was not with her then, and that she could not give an address that would find him : an assertion that confirmed Mattie in the idea that he had started on those far-away travels he had so often spoken of to her.

As autumn passed and the evenings grew chill with the breath of the coming winter, Mattie's health seemed to fail. The deep melancholy that oppressed her threatened to break the springs of life. In order to escape from Mrs. Bankes the girl took to lonely wanderings over the Downs ; wanderings that ended always at Stonedene ; until, with the instinct of a wounded animal that seeks to endure its pain alone, or from the ever present recollection of the last words of Adam, when he had said it was by way of Stonedene that he would return, she besought the farmer to send away the woman in charge of the house and allow her to take her place. From the day of her marriage, merrily at first, and as though half amused at her rise in life, but later in the hope of giving her such comfort as might come from showing his own trust in Adam, Drew had been particular in addressing her by her new title. Mattie was as much soothed by this behaviour as she was ruffled by the opposite conduct of Mrs. Bankes. A certain little dignity of demeanour grew upon young Mrs. Armitage, who yet insisted upon earning her own bread, since Adam's wife must not be dependent upon the charity of even so good a friend as the farmer.

Drew yielded to the wish of the wife, whose heart was breaking with the pain of absence, and the mystery of silence, and Mattie, on this foggy day had already lived months at Stonedene, on the watch always for the coming of Adam.

The fog increased instead of diminishing with the approach of evening. Drew could not see his own house until he was close to it ; as he had remarked, the mystery of Mattie's affairs was not more impenetrable than the veil hiding all natural objects just then. When he had put up the horse and gone in to tea, Mrs. Bankes, as she bustled about, preparing the meal that Mattie's deft little fingers had been wont to set out with so much quietness as well as celerity, did not fail to greet him with the question : " Well, how is she ? "

" She " had come to mean Mattie in the vocabulary of the farmer and his sister.

" About as usual in health," Drew replied, lifting the now five-year-old Harry to his knee ; " but troubled in mind ; though, to be sure, that is as usual too."

" She is *out* of her mind," exclaimed Mrs. Bankes irritably. She had been fond of Mattie, and not indifferent to the value of so fine a subject for gossip as the stolen marriage and the disappearance of the bridegroom ; but Mrs. Bankes had long ago wearied of the

state of affairs, and wished for some change in them; for something new to talk about. "Mattie is out of her mind," she repeated. "Everyone but yourself knows that; and if you do not know it, it is only because you are as mad as she is—or anyone might think so from the way you go on."

"Nay, nay," said Drew gently, as the butter-dish was set upon the table with a vehemence that made the tea-cups rattle. "There are no signs of madness about Mattie—unless you call her trust in her husband by so hard a name."

"Husband! a pretty husband, indeed! I've no patience with him, nor with you either. As if it was not a common tale enough! It would be better to persuade the girl to come home and get to work again, than to encourage her in her fancies, while you pay another servant here—and times so hard as they are."

"Oh, that is just my luck," observed Drew, laughing.

"Luck! don't talk to me of ill-luck, when it is, and always has been, nothing but the weakmindedness of helping other folks that ought to stand alone." Mrs. Bankes did not allude, although she might have done so, to how much her brother had helped *her*. "If you minded only your own concerns you'd be a lucky man enough. You are not fool enough to suppose Stonedene will let as long as Mattie's there, I hope. Fetch her home, and don't go calling her 'Ma'am,' and making believe to see things as she sees them."

"It is no make-believe on my part. I can't bring myself to think ill of a man who showed me so much of his mind as Mr. Armitage did. I don't say I can understand, or can even give a guess at what has happened, but I do say I am certain it can be explained. To be sure, it may be as Mattie fears and he may be dead, and if so, we shall never have the explanation. Still, I judge him, as his wife does, by what I know him to be at heart—and that is a good man, if ever there was one."

"Stuff!" cried Eliza, fairly losing her temper. "I judge people by their actions. What else can one go by? Handsome is as handsome does, I say."

"I was thinking to-day," the farmer went on, softly passing his broad palm over the blond head of the child upon his knee: "I was thinking as I came along of how it stands written: 'He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?' And it may be true also that we cannot properly trust in Heaven if we have no trust at all in man—in good men, I mean."

"It is to be hoped you know what you mean, for I don't," snapped Eliza, who, not in the habit of bringing Heaven into her own conversation, was uncomfortable when her brother did so. Her Bible lay upon the window-ledge, and during the week gathered no more dust upon its red cover than the Bibles of most busy people do.

When she had that book in her hand and her best bonnet on her head on a Sunday afternoon, Eliza Bankes considered herself as religious a woman as need be. She had small patience with her brother's trick of dragging religion into all the affairs of daily life. Mr. Armitage used to do the same, and he certainly had proved himself not better, but much worse, than the generality of men.

"You should bestir yourself," Mrs. Bankes continued. "You should do something, instead of sitting down to trust in the goodness of a man whose actions prove him a villain."

"What *can* I do?" said the farmer, recapitulating, more for his own momentary satisfaction than in answer to his sister, the little he had already done, that little being all that appeared to him feasible. "I went to London; Mrs. Armitage was on the eve of a journey; I went a second time, to find her gone and the establishment broken up. A proud woman she seemed; a woman who always held her head high, I should say: no wonder my errand displeased her."

"Stuck-up, fine madam!" cried Eliza, reaching down a pile of old delft plates from the dresser. "A fine time Mattie would have had of it amongst them—not that it makes the case any the better for the man who played her false."

At that instant the shadowy form of some one going round to the front door passed the window, against which the fog pressed closely. Drew set little Harry on his feet, and rose slowly, listening with intentness and a surprised look that made his sister ask what ailed him.

"Rover—the dog does not bark; who—by the mercy of Heaven, it is the man himself!" cried Drew, as the room door opened with a suddenness that caused Mrs. Bankes to drop the plates on the brick floor. For Adam Armitage stood upon the threshold: Adam, pale and worn, a shadow of his former self, but himself unmistakably.

For an instant a pin might have been heard to fall in the dead silence that fell upon the group. Outside, like a thick curtain hung the white fog; within, the lifting of the veil was at hand. Yet it was hardly curiosity, certainly not doubt, that might have been read in the eyes of the farmer, as, the first shock of surprise over, the two men faced each other. Adam had looked round the room as though seeking some one, had smiled in his old fashion at Harry, given a half curious, half indifferent glance to Eliza Bankes, and then turned to the farmer.

"Drew," he said simply, "where is my wife?"

"Mrs. Armitage is waiting for you at Stonedene, sir; there was some talk of your coming back that way."

Drew spoke almost as though no more than the two days agreed upon had passed since they met last, and Mrs. Bankes stooped to gather up the fallen pieces of crockery.

"Waiting!" Adam threw up his hands with a passionate gesture; "what can she have thought?"

"She has thought you were gone after all upon that voyage, and

that your letters had miscarried. Sometimes she has thought that you were dead, Mr. Armitage, but never——" Drew broke off and held out his hand: "We knew you could explain what has happened, sir," he concluded.

Adam drew his own hand across his eyes, in the way a man might do who has lately been roused from a bad dream and has some trouble to collect his thoughts.

"That has happened," he said, "which, if it had not befallen me myself and become a part of my own experience, I should find it difficult to believe possible. A strange thing has happened, and yet"—here the old smile they remembered so well broke slowly like light over his face—"and yet a thing not more strange, as the world goes, than that you—I say nothing of Mattie—but that you should have trusted me throughout. I detected no mistrust in your voice, no doubt in your eyes, not even when they first met mine just now. They call mine a rare case, friend; they might say the same of your belief in me. But—Stonedene did you say? Walk with me there, and hear my tale as we go."

"This evening; and in this mist; and you, sir, looking far from well," began Eliza Bankes, the colour in her cheeks of course attributable only to her having stooped over the broken plates. "Mattie has waited so long already that one night more will make but little difference."

"One night, one *hour* more than I can help will make all the difference between wilful wrong and a misfortune that has fallen on both alike," said Adam. He would not be dissuaded from setting out at once, and in another minute the two men were pursuing their way through the driving mist, Adam talking as they went.

That which had befallen him had caused huge rejoicings amongst certain of his friends: men whose names stood high in the medical world of science, and who were grateful to him beyond measure for affording them so fine an opportunity of studying a rare case. After parting from Mattie, he had taken train to London, where arriving in due course, he drove in a cab towards his mother's house in Grosvenor Street, within a few yards of which his cab overturned and Adam was thrown out, falling heavily upon his head. They said his skull was fractured. After a long interval, however, he opened his eyes and recovered consciousness; and, as he did so, slowly at first, after a time more fully, the astounding discovery was made that memory was entirely gone. It took not days, but weeks to make sure of this. The symptom was attributed to brain fever, to the effects of the shock; to one thing, then to another; but as time went on and the mind struggled in vain to remember, just as the body might vainly have tried to use a crushed or paralysed limb, the doctors all arrived at the same conclusion. Some portion of the injured skull, pressing upon the brain, had paralysed the nerve of memory.

The one or two other authentic cases of a like condition were eagerly cited, and a babble of learned talk arose over poor Adam, who could not tell whence he came or whither he had been going when the accident happened. To be sure, he re-learned by degrees from others, his mother especially, the past which was mysteriously blotted out from his own experience ; but that which no one but himself had known, no one could now recall to him. His Sussex walking tour, the lonely farm upon the Downs, Mattie, his marriage and brief honeymoon were to his paralysed mind as though they had never been, but for a sense of irreparable loss that seemed to weigh upon him and made the misery of his life.

However, this state was one from which, so said his friends, science could at will recall him, and the operation necessary to restore Adam to himself was deferred only until his health admitted of its being attended by a minimum of risk.

It was while Adam was in the state above described that Drew had seen Mrs. Armitage. A proud woman, often as she had wished that her son would settle in life, she was ill pleased to hear he had married a farm servant : for that was the one fact that, stripped of Drew's panegyrics upon Mattie's superior education and refined manners, alone stared her in the face.

Hastily resolving that there was no need to embitter her own life by any attempt to recall to her son this ill-fated marriage, and that therefore the experiment of allowing him to see the farmer or to hear Mattie's name should not be made, she did not hesitate to deceive her unwelcome visitor. Change of scene had been ordered for the patient, and before Drew called at the house in Grosvenor Street for the second time, Adam and his mother were gone. It was in Paris, months after, that the operation was finally and successfully performed, and then, the first word of Adam, was Mattie's name. The first effort of his newly recovered powers was to relate to his mother the history of his marriage and to write to his wife.

"God grant the suspense has neither killed her nor driven her mad!" he exclaimed.

It was to his mother's hand the letter was confided, and with that exclamation of his ringing in her ears, Mrs. Armitage stood beside the brazier filled with charcoal and burning in the ante-room of their apartment in the Champs Elysées. She was not a bad woman, but the temptation was too strong to allow this affair to unravel itself, and see what would turn up. If the girl were dead, why no harm had been done, and this terrible mistake of her son's was rectified at once. If the other alternative were to prove true and Mattie had lost her senses, Adam would be equally free from her, or measures could be taken to ensure so desirable a result. Mrs. Armitage tore the letter into pieces and waited by the brazier until the fragments were charred. Adam asked no awkward questions, and was not even surprised at receiving no answer to his epistle, since in it he had an-

nounced his coming. The first day his health admitted of it, he set out alone for England.

Such was the story; one that Adam himself knew only in part, being ignorant of his mother's share in it. When Drew had told of his efforts to seek Adam, and had mentioned that no letter had reached Mattie, Adam was at no loss to understand at once the part his mother had played. But he never spoke of it, then or at any future time.

The house door at Stonedene stood ajar; evening had closed in now, and the chilly fog was still abroad, but the figure at the gate was dimly discernible.

Adam hastened his steps.

"For heaven's sake, sir, be careful! the suddenness of it might turn her brain," cried Drew, laying a detaining hand upon the arm of his companion.

Adam gently shook him off.

"Suddenness," he repeated. "Aye, it is sudden to you—and to Mrs. Banks. I was sorry, by the way, that the delft plates were broken—but for me and for Mattie whose thoughts are day and night, night and day full of each other, how can it be sudden?"

Drew stood still, and Adam went on alone, until his footsteps became audible and Mattie turned her head to see him standing at her side.

Adam had been right; no fear was there for Mattie's brain. All excitement, all surprise and wonder came afterwards; at that first supreme moment, and with a satisfied sigh, as of a child who has got all it wants, Mattie held out her arms to him, with one word—

"Husband!"

As Adam drew her to him it was not only the mist, or the darkening evening that blinded Drew so that for a moment or two he saw neither of them.

People say Drew's luck has turned from the day Stonedene found a tenant. It is newly done up and prettily furnished now; Mr. and Mrs. Armitage come down there once or twice a year, with their children, for a breath of sea air and to visit old friends.



LOOKING BACK.

Are the sun-ripe apples gathered ?

Do the violets scent the bed ?

The almond-breathing clematis

Full clustered overhead ?

Is the autumn air as balmy,

And the evening sky as red ?

Are ruddy leaves yet falling

On the dew-ensilvered lawn ?

Do butterflies still flicker

When the vapours are withdrawn

Over blossoms flush'd or fading,

Fire-tinted as the dawn ?

Is light and shadow dreaming

In the sheltered laurel glade ?

In the wilderness I planted

Do the birds sing undismayed—

The old birds, and the nestlings

That were hatched beneath its shade ?

The shapes of breezy whiteness

That gamboll'd at my feet,

With eager eyes, and loving cries,

And life at fever-heat—

They are resting in the twilight

Of that ever-green retreat.

O sweet it was to loiter

With one no longer Here ;

The sunny stillness shaken

By carols loud and clear :

Our pleasant talk suspended

For joys of eye and ear.

To greet the budding spring-time

And watch the year's decay,

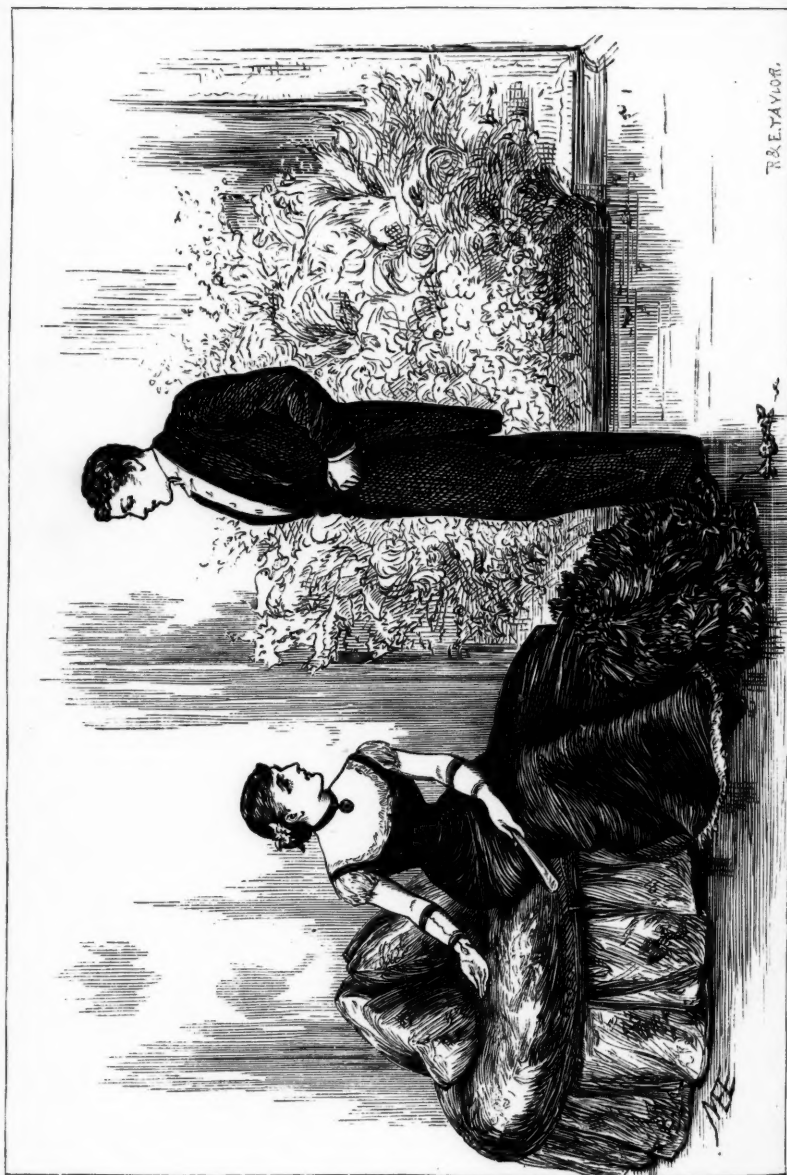
And make my heart the counterpart

Of Nature's ebb and play,

That weeps and grieves, and sheds her leaves,

To smile again in May.

C. M. GEMMER.



R. E. TAYLOR.

R. AND R. TAYLOR.

PHILIP AND MRS. DUCIE MEET AT LORD CAMPBELL'S.

M. ELLIS EDWARDS.

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